Jesuit-Krauss-McCormick Library
BT1101 .M667
Minton, Henry Collin MAIN
Christianity supernatural : a brief essa
3 9967 00202 3526

593240

ACCESSION NUMBER 2,758

SHELF NUMBER BT 1101 M667

The Virginia Library

McCormick

Theological Seminary

of the

Presbyterian Church, Chicago.

From the Stanley McCormick Fund.

RECEIVED

CHRISTIANITY SUPERNATURAL

A BRIEF ESSAY ON CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE

Ἑτοιμοι δὲ ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδος, μετὰ πραΰτητος καὶ φόβου.—1 PETER ii : 15.

BY

HENRY COLLIN MINTON, D. D.

Professor in San Francisco Theological Seminary

PHILADELPHIA

THE WESTMINSTER PRESS

1900

Copyright, 1900, by The Trustees of
The Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work.

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/christianitysupe0000henr

Copyright, 1900, by The Trustees of
The Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work.

VICTORIA LIBRARY
MCCORMICK
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

151
1101
M667

AUTHOR'S NOTE

When the publishers did the writer the honor to request him to prepare a brief treatise on the "Evidences of Christianity," the request was accompanied with the intimation that the manuscript asked for was to be one of a number upon related topics. In this way it was made proper to assume that very much, which would otherwise be embraced in the subject assigned, would be treated by other and more competent hands. Accordingly, no reference has been made to that wide and attractive field of study commonly designated as "Natural Theology." Neither has the writer cared to invade the province of those who are to discuss the questions of biblical criticism which are so inextricably involved in any complete modern apologetic.

The specific theme of the essay is one of the very greatest importance. To evangelical Christianity, it is nothing less than the *articulus stantis*

vel cadentis ecclesiæ. The only sure basis of our hope that Christianity will stand is in the faith that Christianity is supernatural.

H. C. M.

San Anselmo, June, 1900.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Introductory, The Call for Evidence	9
II.	Christianity	25
III.	The "Claims" of Christianity	35
IV.	The Supernatural	47
V.	Miracles	61
VI.	The Right of Miracles to Occur	83
VII.	The Positive Argument for Miracles	97
VIII.	Prophecy	113
IX.	Scripture	125
X.	History	141
XI.	Christ the Supreme Evidence	155

There are but two sorts of persons who can be called rational; either those that serve God with all their heart because they know him; or those that seek him with all their heart because they do not know him.—Pascal.

There is small chance of truth at the goal where there is not childlike humility at the starting-point.—Coleridge.

It matters more what a man believes if he is sincere than if he is insincere.—Welsh.

Our estimate of the evidences of any fact necessarily varies according to the greater or less antecedent probability which we attach to the fact.—Mozley.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY—THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE

In glancing at some of the elements of Christian evidence, there are a few things which we do well to have in mind.

In the first place, it is interesting to note that, all along its history, Christianity has been expected to prove itself true. Not one of its claims has been allowed, without first showing that it merited allowance. Error dogs the heels of truth as shadow follows substance in a cloudless sun; and the brighter the sun, the blacker the shadow. Christianity has not been assumed to be true, simply because it presumes to be good. Indeed, the very loftiness of its claims has sometimes been the occasion of suspicious doubt, and again of avowed opposition. It has been said—and truly—that the very sacredness of its self-alleged character is the measure of a certain presumption against Christianity, to be broken down before it can be accepted as true; or, on the other hand, it is the measure of its own hypocrisy and of our just contempt, if it so be that

Christianity fail to make good what it so boldly affirms.

But it is also interesting to observe that Christianity has always cordially conceded the entire reasonableness of such a demand. The most that it asks for is a fair hearing and a just verdict. It begs no favors, it wants no franking privileges, it shirks or shrinks from no legitimate issue. It would count it both injury and insult to be tendered the faith of a man who had not first carefully examined its right to his faith, or to be honored with the homage of men whose very homage, by reason of their intellectual indolence and consequent guilty ignorance, were nothing more than an empty and dishonoring superstition.

Christianity challenges investigation. Moreover, Christianity confidently believes that it has in good faith fully and fairly met every such test. It points to its history with humble pride. It argues that though antecedent presumptions were against it at the start, it has now forged its way so far into the front, it has now met the merciless exactions of the human intellect so often, that its eighteen and a half centuries may well entitle it to reverse its first attitude and to throw the burden of proof on the other side. Nearly two millenniums certainly ought to be time enough to prove something to the satisfac-

tion of all. Old Gamaliel's test[1] has been pretty fairly tried, and whatever else may have been proven or not proven, one thing is certain—the faith of the apostles has not "come to naught." How long are we to wait before we can take for granted the only remaining alternative of the venerable rabbi's dilemma, and conclude that Christianity is indeed "of God"?

It is not only the right, it is the duty of the student of Christian evidence, to see to it that no violence is done to the proper prerogatives of the right reason. Christianity must be willing to argue its case on its merits, expecting nothing more than an enlightened judge and an impartial judgment. The heavenliness of religion, as to its origin or as to its character, is no just ground on which it is to be given exemption from the legitimate tests of all accredited truth. Men are not endowed with two kinds of reason, terrestrial and celestial, by which they are to pass upon two kinds of truth, earthly and heavenly. If God made man—and, too, in his own image—then God is the author of the laws that regulate man's healthy normal action; and so the processes of man's mind are, in their way, an expression of God's will. It would be to convict the Creator of self-contradiction, if it could be shown that

[1] Acts v: 38, 39.

he ever requires his rational creatures to believe a single alleged truth except in accordance with the laws which he has impressed upon their very nature. When a writer speaks of the same thing as "logically true and morally false,"[1] it should not be forgotten that there is a loose cog somewhere either in the logic, in premise or process, or in the morals. To be sure, sin has come in and blighted, with its deadly mildew, every faculty of man. His intellect is darkened; his will is palsied; his soul is spiritually dead. As things are, man is abnormal: his reason is not always right reason; his judgment is warped; he is at enmity with holiness and truth.

Still, man is man yet; he cannot delegate his responsibility to another. Spiritually dead, he yet thinks and feels and chooses. His misfortune or his fault, or both, the effect of sin, can by no means be argued as an excuse for continuing in sin. He must make the best of it. He must consider, reflect, reason, conclude, decide, act. He may need help from above himself. He does need it, and such help is freely tendered on easiest conditions.

Still, the man is himself through it all; his personality is unchanged. His faculties are his own; if they are impaired, they are none the less

[1] Dr. Henry Van Dyke's *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, p. 303.

his. The important thing of all to him is, that what is left of him, after the terrible shipwreck of sin, is *his own*. The intellect of an archangel transcends his own darkened mind immeasurably, but then it belongs to the archangel. The rational powers of a sanctified soul are far beyond his clouded reason, but that clouded reason is all *he* has.

Therefore, Christianity must appeal to the reason that is in man. It may bring with it subjective tonics to quicken the impaired faculties of the sinner, but it is apart from our thought just now to take them into the account. In the whole process of saving a sinner from the vice of the slums to the heights of glory, his personality is free, his faculties are his own, his thoughts and volitions and choices are as completely his own as if the divine were extinct.

If Christianity is to be embraced by a thoughtful man, it will be because it seems reasonable to him, and not to somebody else, to embrace it. He who believes what his own reason does not accept in so far throws away his noblest gift and becomes not a saint of God, but a man of wood.

Jacobi said: "By my faith I am a Christian; by my reason I am a heathen." Such a false idea is based on a false psychology. Man's soul is an indivisible unit, a spiritual *atom*. We cannot speak of the reason and the will as different parts

of the soul, in the way that we speak of the head and the foot as different parts of the body. Faculties are attitudes, energies of the soul. It is utterly unpsychological to say that our faith or feeling goes one way and our reason another. A faith that has not evidence somewhere is not faith at all, but complete folly. A faith that builds on evidence has reason for its consulting architect. Faith means assent; assent means conviction; conviction means evidence. Evidence without faith is skepticism; faith without evidence is superstition.

Of course, the tests applied must be suited to the truths presented. Right reason would never apply mathematical tests to poetical effusions, or ethical criteria to a scientific truth. It is not a test of an army that it cannot write an epic, or of an "earthquake that it did not shake a demonstration of Euclid." It is folly to try to weigh truth in an apothecary's scales or to measure it with a carpenter's rule. Scales for quinine and yard-sticks for muslin, but the truths of Christianity must have tests that are suited to their nature and evidence. Pascal says: "We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart." Much depends upon the kind of truth that is known. It would hardly be venturing very far to say that the heart has not much to do in assenting to

a geometrical theorem or accepting a chemical formula.

It is a great mistake to imagine that Christianity is any less rational because its teachings are not mathematical demonstrations. Reason stamps its *visé* upon a vast deal that the mathematician would throw out. The moral qualities of the mind are almost decisive in fixing its faith or its doubt. The wish is oftener father to the *faith* than to the thought. Every mind brings to its inquiry its own presuppositions. It may try very hard not to, but it is bound to fail. Public sentiment is an atmosphere, and a man must breathe it or die. We all have our prejudices, and they are often strongest when we are unconscious of them. Often, to deny them is only to own them. The prejudices are not much less than prejudgments in the mind, and hence we see how difficult it is for Christianity to secure a fair hearing. No mind is a blank; it is in an attitude of belief or unbelief. In matters of Christianity, unbelief is another name for disbelief. The soul abhors a spiritual vacuum; failure to believe is positive rejection of the faith. And so it is that when the human reason is appealed to in behalf of Christianity, the first task in hand is to convince an unfriendly judge.

Christianity does not regard cold reason as the

only judge. The court of reason is the court of original jurisdiction, and as in criminal jurisprudence there is never an appeal from an acquittal, so, if unbelief is acquitted in the judgment of reason, Christianity is finally vetoed. This is why the findings of the reason are so important. If its verdict is against Christianity, the case is closed; if in favor of it, then it is eager to prove its claims in every appellate court.

If Christianity does not have that which commands the conviction and controls the corresponding rational action of men, then, after all, it has "come to naught." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But how shall a rational mind believe on him without seeing something in him that calls out its faith? "Faith cometh by hearing," and the preacher is sent that men may hear. Without believable elements in the message, the suggestion of being "saved" for believing it would be nothing less than a corrupting bribe which a reasonable man must forego his honorable manliness in order to accept.

The same authority that exacts the faith sees to it that the fullest evidence is set forth in the gospel that is given. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It were an insult to demand a rational being's *love*, except as its object is revealed as one ineffably lovable, manifestly lovely. Paul tells the Thessalonians to

"rejoice," but they were fools even to try to rejoice except as they saw reasons for rejoicing. Just so it is that when Christianity claims the deepest reverence of the soul and exacts the highest tribute of man's rational being, it also reveals truths, presents incentives, and proposes motives that are worthy to move the truest, the noblest, the best that is within him.

Somewhere and somehow, then, the reason has its work to do in accepting Christianity, and it is out of regard for that work that evidences of Christianity are called for and produced. The high rationalist declares that there can be no evidences of Christianity apart from such as are *in* Christianity. "He argued not, but preached, and conscience did the rest." This is very much the view expressed by Origen in the preface to his book in answer to the argumentative assaults of Celsus. The truth is its own best defense. The Bible is the best book of apologetics; the simple statement of pure Christianity is its own best argument, and the character of Jesus of Nazareth is the most effective answer to all his assailants.

This idea has been pushed too far, so as to exclude or disparage certain evidence of great value. Really, it is a question whether any evidence can properly be called extraneous. It is rather a part, an element, of the thing it evidences. For example,

we shall hardly put Christianity on one side, and miracles on the other, and say that these are a proof of that. We shall more accurately say that while miracles have their evidential value, they are still a part of the whole for which they stand. Christianity minus miracles would be *per se* a different thing entirely from Christianity as it is. So also with prophecy and the moral evidences from Christian history. There can be no doubt that latterly, with the disposition to emphasize the intrinsic, self-evidencing, rational and moral aspects of Christianity, there has been a tendency to minimize certain apologetic factors in the Christian system which in former times were possibly made too much of, but which, rightly apprehended, have their place of no small importance as integral elements of a complete Christianity.

If there is in Christianity that which overtops our reason, then our reason must see evidence for believing so. The client may not know much law, but he is right in wanting good evidence that his attorney knows the law. The patient understands nothing about drugs, but he wants evidence which he can pass upon that his physician knows drugs well. We cannot compass all the truth nor all the grace which Christianity reveals, but we are entirely right in expecting it to produce good proof that it *is* truth and that it *is* grace.

We have no quarrel with anyone who depreciates the "evidences," if he will content himself with saying that Christianity never reaches high-tide mark along apologetical lines. Proving Christianity true is something of an afterthought. There must first be seen the truth to be proven. Paul apologized for "boasting," but his enemies, who were trying to wreck the church which he had founded at Corinth, "compelled" him. The persistent opposers of Christianity compel its champions to show that, if they have whereof to boast, the Christians have much more. Seeing that many gloried after the flesh, Paul gloried also; seeing that many glory in the evidences of the truth, let us glory also. The vocation of the apologist will doubtless be obsolete in heaven. Even now the best blessings of the believer are in the spontaneous outflow of his joyous activities, rather than in the constrained reflective analysis of a guarded self-defense. Principal Caird has well said: "It is impossible to enjoy at one and the same moment the blessedness of devotion and the colder satisfaction of reflex thought."[1]

It is better to be preaching than to be proving; it is better to be evangelizing than to be analyzing. Still, the work of modern apologetics is of the very greatest importance, and while its primary aim may be that of intellectual conciliation rather

[1] *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 42.

than of spiritual edification, yet, in response to the peculiar conditions of modern thought and life, Christianity has needed those who are set for the defense, not less than those who are set for the proclamation, of the gospel.

No, mere reason cannot save men. "Devils believe—and tremble." Devils are orthodox, but they are orthodox devils. Rational assent does not make a Christian, but no one can be a Christian without rational assent. It is well to know that the infidel has harder intellectual difficulties to face than the believer has. All things taken into the account, the reason finds it easier to believe Christianity true than to believe it false.

If otherwise, then Christianity is only "an irrational pathological phenomenon," and will soon give place to something better; then devotion is the child of ignorance; then piety is imbecility, and Christian churches asylums for the feeble-minded.

This is the issue that is met in the apologetics of to-day; the life of Christianity is involved in the outcome. If something else is truer, then something else is better, and something else is what the world needs and ought to have. Essential Christianity is eternal truth or it is eternally untrue. Man's reason now is but a reflection of the Eternal Reason, but right reason here is right

reason everywhere; and if the system of thought and force and life, which Christendom holds dear as its own life-blood and sacred as heaven itself, is not to fade away as a morning mist, it is because it has in itself and from itself that which evinces its inherent truth and proclaims it to all inquiring intelligences as the Eternal Thought of the ever-living God.

Christianity is that religion in which the impulse and power to a blessed and holy life is bound up with faith in God as the Father of Jesus Christ.—HARNACK.

The Christian religion is one phenomenon, a totality, a whole, of which the New Testament is only a part. We of to-day are in actual contact with a living Christianity which has persisted through nineteen centuries of chance and change.—ILLINGWORTH.

In every generation it must henceforth become more and more recognized by logical thinking, that all antecedent objections to Christianity founded on reason alone are *ipso facto* nugatory.—ROMANES.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIANITY

In any discussion it is important to have a clear conception of the terms employed.

It is no easy task to define "Christianity." The things that are most familiar are often the things that puzzle us most when we would translate them into an exact logical equivalent. Try to define life, nature, the sky, friendship, love, home, language, civilization, and the difficulty will appear. We think we know what they are until we essay a definition; and we *do* know what they are. The ability to frame an accurate definition, sharply including all that belongs to the thing defined and sharply excluding all that does not, is no fair test of our actual knowledge.

We shall hardly presume, then, to construct an unexceptionable definition of Christianity. The broader the idea, the harder to define it; the more familiar the concept, the more difficult to abstract it and make it the object of cold reflective contemplation. If we can succeed in getting such a definite conception of Christianity, therefore, as will

answer our present purpose, we shall not now attempt to do more.

Christianity is one of the world's great religions. The ethnologist catalogues it among the sacred systems of mankind. To dispute the justice of this is to anticipate conclusions which presumably the student of Christian evidence has not yet reached. Ideally, and only ideally, he begins his study without bias, pro or con. His first general impression, at least, will be that the other systems arrogate to themselves everything which Christianity presumes to be. To call it the *Religio Licita* among the disallowed systems is to publish to the world the verdict before the case has been tried.

Perhaps we may as well regard Christianity as over against two opposing positions. The first is in distinction from the ethnic religions to which we have just referred. Not that there are not elements of truth in them; not that there are not valuable ethical factors in some of them, in common with Christianity; not that we would circumscribe the gracious work of the sovereign Spirit who "works when, where, and how he willeth"; not that we would take for granted the supernatural elements which Christians declare to be sufficient to distinguish their faith preëminently from all the rest; but, regarding the specific

nature of the task set before us, namely, the consideration of the *Christian* scheme, excluding the religious aspects of the natural and moral world which the faith of the Bible contemplates in common with some of the extra-biblical faiths; and remembering that our lifelong familiarity with the whole subject makes unnecessary a restatement of all the elements involved in the problem, we at once narrow our range from that of religion in general, with its vast field of theistic evidences and human aspirings, to the Christian religion as the substantial equivalent of Christianity. And, too, we are to consider Christianity as over against no-religion. It is true that any religion is better than none. "The good is the enemy of the best," only when that good crystallizes into a finality; it is a friend of the best when it is willing to be a preparation and stepping-stone to it. Ante-Christian Judaism, on the one hand, as God designed it to be, and, on the other, as perverted by Jewish bigotry, well illustrates the difference. Missionaries know how great is that difference on pagan and Moslem soil to-day. Religion within, which is the antecedent of religion without, is universal. Atheism is the festered fruit of a self-conscious civilization. A man must be pedagogued and pampered away from his naïve self before he can be an atheist. He must be always on his guard against his spontaneous natural self. "The cor-

ruption of the best things is the worst," and it takes a genuine Christian civilization to produce, like rankest weeds in richest gardens, the most conspicuous specimens of the *genus irreligiosum*.

Prof. John Fiske says: "Atheism is bad metaphysics." There is no point of view from which it is not bad, but for present purposes we shall leave that for the writer of another treatise in this series to prove.

Christianity is such a large and many-sided complex that it is not strange that Christians themselves have sometimes made the sincere mistake of putting a part or phase of it for the whole.

It is not a system of truth only. Theology is not all of Christianity, any more than anatomy is all of physiology. Still, it would be a flabby physiology without the anatomical skeleton, and it would be a flaccid faith that has no theological framework within.

There is little need just now of emphasizing the thought that Christianity is not all dogma. This view is in danger of over-emphasis, and we need someone to tell us again that dogma has its place in the Christian scheme, and that, though a creed or confession is not Christianity, yet there is no healthy Christianity without a creed and confession. Still, we are not to forget that the essen-

tial elements are those which are before and back of these confessions, making them what they are.

Christianity is not a pious state or feeling only. No danger is greater than that of mistaking a morbid, vision-expecting subjectivism for the true thing. If it is not a dogmatic system, much less is it an emotional ebullition of the sensibilities of men. If it were only this, then Christian evidences would be an absurdity; for how can a *feeling* be shown to be true? Neither does this turbulent and unsteady flow of fervid feeling any more become essential Christianity by being enlarged into the ceaseless and majestic stream that comes flowing on from age to age through the common religious consciousness of mankind, or, indeed, through the common Christian consciousness of the universal Church.

Christianity is not an ethical order only. It is fundamentally religious in its origin, its contents, and its commands. It declines to baptize anyone as its devotee who nobly serves his fellowman, but who ignores his God; who affects to love his brother, and yet who hates his Lord. It traces all high ambition and achievement to the hand that is Divine, and centers all duty and destiny in the will of Him whose supreme right it is to rule. Christianity is not an institution or a form only. It is primarily spiritual. It enjoins and charters forms, but they are forms only. If

these forms lack the substance which is essential Christianity, they degenerate into mere formalism which is Christianity stagnant and decadent. The Church is an integral part of organic Christianity; its institutions and ordinances are not to be despised, but they are not all of Christianity.

Christianity is not a life only. It is life—life divine, life enkindling, life bestowing; but it is more. There are truths to be believed; there are facts to be contemplated; there are principles to be regarded; there are duties to be performed. While this divine life, mystic and mysterious, is the quickening force that makes the dead alive with a life that is eternal, still it is a mistake, that has been made, to regard this life as all of Christianity, and so to rob its followers of those stable and permanent elements which it contains, and which are at once the basis of their strongest character and the crown of their highest culture.

Christianity is not a sect only. No matter which is the part *cutting off*, and which *cut off*, neither one nor both can be all of Christianity. Newman said: "Whatever be historical Christianity, it is not Protestantism." And Principal Fairbairn answers: "And we may add, still less is it Catholicism." Both are right in what they say, and both are wrong in what they do not say, if they regard either Protestantism or Catholicism as a synonym for catholic Christianity.

Christianity is the religion of Jesus Christ: actually, as it is; ideally, as it would be. It stands over against all other systems that claim the religious faith and homage of mankind, and against that self-exiling no-religion which kills the highest life of men.

It is not dogma only, though it has its dogmatic side. It is not feeling only, though every soul it touches has deep and vivid emotions responding to that touch. It is not a code of morals only, though it has its ethical principles and precepts, its "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." It is not a form only, though the forms and institutions it sanctions in the holy Church are for the honor of God and the good of men. It is not a life only, though it is life and gives life to all who will heartily receive it. It is not a sect only, though it cannot be denied that the saintliest and best of its champions in every age have been loyally identified with some branch or division of the Church of God on earth.

In presenting and considering evidences in its support, it is obvious that Christianity must *ipso facto* be contemplated as a system of religious thought. Historically, doctrinally, ethically, or practically, apologetics view the intellectual aspects of Christianity; or, in any case, view its elements intellectually. Evidence is nonsense

except as it establishes something to be true. Christianity purports to be true; and so, whatever may be the final conclusion, it is necessary, in passing upon its right to our credence, to regard it in the character of a body of truth: truth only tentatively, if its evidence be found to be inadequate, but finally and formally if it be found to be convincing and conclusive.

Christianity is the complex, organic, historic system of religious truth which has for its origin the Infinite God, for its charter the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, for its efficiency the Immanent Spirit, and for its Revelator, its inspiration and its goal, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became human in history, who lived and died for the redemption of man, and who rose again from the dead. "Objectively Christianity is Christ himself and the redeeming work which has its source in his Person. Subjectively it is faith in him as Redemption manifested—the experience of this redeeming work in the heart."[1]

[1] Christlieb's *Modern Doubt and Christian Faith*, p. 39.

Many of the utterances ascribed to Jesus, which involve a Messianic consciousness, plainly breathe the spirit of lowliness rather than that of arrogance or vainglory.—Bruce.

How can we regard as practically true, conceptions which are acknowledged to be theoretically false?—Ed. Caird.

No better definition of truth can be given than that of Edwards, who makes it the image of existence, the correspondence of mind with reality, of thought with being.—Gordon.

CHAPTER III

THE "CLAIMS" OF CHRISTIANITY

EITHER Christianity is what it represents itself to be, or it is false. It may be regarded as an excellent system of ethics; but, if it be found that it declares itself to be more, but is *not* more, then its false representations make it less. We form our judgment upon any question of moral worth not only upon what the object of judgment *is*, but also upon what it *purports to be*. We consider not only character, but also profession; profession also, because it becomes an element in the manifestation, and, therefore, in the judgment of the character. A peasant may be all right *as* a peasant; only if he pose as the son of a prince, we lose our confidence in him as a peasant. A prestidigitator may not be a bad character as such; but if in his juggleries he claim to be in confidential relations with the spirit-world, we revise our judgment of the ethical virtues of the juggler. A human saint merits our highest reverence; but if we find him professing, like some Hindoo avatar, to be Divinity

incarnate, we must change the viewpoint of our regard.

Christianity as a doctrine, or an institution, or a life, is one thing; Christianity purporting to be a revelation from heaven, is quite another. The question of origins, therefore, enters very largely into the question of its character. If Christianity is only evolved from below, while it keeps telling us that it is given from above, then, with all its high principles and holy incentives, it is guilty of falsehood. If it claim to be what it is not, it breaks our faith in what it is.

Hence the importance, in Christian evidence, of what have been not very happily called the "claims" of Christianity. The rationalist excepts very strongly to the idea conveyed in the phrase, insisting that the judgment of Christianity must always be based upon the intrinsic excellence of its contents; and that, if it put forth any evidences of an external kind or any "claims" outside of its very self, they are incidental, adventitious, superfluous, almost puerile. If it be true, nothing else can make it truer; and if it be not true, nothing else can make it less false. It is folly to deny that there is truth in this position, only it must not for a moment be forgotten that all that can properly be meant by the "claims" of Christianity is a necessary and integral part

of Christianity itself, when rightly and fully apprehended.

The harsh suggestion that Christianity argues "claims" and makes special pleadings for the favorable judgment of men is wholly a gratuitous importation from foreign sources. We shall hardly charge a man with arrogance, who, having business with us, tells us plainly who he is. The suffering victim of a railway collision in a foreign country will be glad to have the kind stranger who approaches him tell him that he is a physician; and the higher the grade of credentials he can show, the more fortunate will the sufferer count himself. Assuming, for the moment, that Christianity is a revelation from God, then why in all reason should it refrain from revealing itself to be such? It brings its message—itself; but it must not prove to a doubting hearer, forsooth, that it is such a message. It must not make known at full value what it is, for then there will be occasion for an offended rationalist to hurl at it the charge of excessive self-consciousness and of attitudinizing for the suffrages of mankind. Not being a Platonic-like philosophy, Christianity has never disguised its solicitude concerning the disposition which men shall make of it. It does appeal for their faith; it does plead for their acceptance. It is nothing to the physician whether the half-dead sufferer he finds

will accept his ministrations and remedies, but it is everything to the sufferer himself. The physician is there simply for the sake of the victim. He may argue his experience and produce his diplomas simply to persuade the victim to take the relief he is ready to bestow.

It is for the sake of mankind that Christianity would approve itself as true. Its errand is rather that of the philanthropist than of the philosopher. Its truth is revealed for the sake of the good it will do. It "claims" nothing in a sinister or selfish spirit—by no means; it only produces its mighty truths and proclaims its holy evangels in such a way as best to overcome the barriers and meet the needs of the clouded and enfeebled human reason.

It will hardly be disputed that Christianity does purport to be more than an ordinary product of history. The Bible throughout gives the impression that its contents are not elsewhere accessible to men. Its majestic tone, in effect, declines to recognize any rival in its sphere. From first to last, it stands as the utterance of the One God whose very existence its own relation to him makes it unnecessary either to argue or even formally to announce. Its contents are understandable only on the theory that that assumption is correct. The Scriptures are a deliverance rather than

a demonstration, an imperative rather than a subjunctive. They sublimely take for granted what the world's philosophic systems have, with doubtful success, been striving in their own way to elaborate. This very fact and feature differentiates Christianity's Book from all others in the literatures of the past. It invests it with the mighty majesty of conscious truth.

This impression grows upon the mind as we read into the pages of the Testaments. God's relations to his creature-world, his dealings with the sons of men, his displeasure at their sin, his visitation of the penalties of sin upon the antediluvian races, his call to Abram of Ur, his discipline and deliverance of a certain people, his theocratic education of the Hebrew nationality, his frequent utterances of righteousness by the mouth of chosen prophets: and, through it all, his directing of the destinies of nations, his turning of the tides of history for the final accomplishment of his fore-ordered ends: all this, read between the lines and in the lines of the Old Testament, bespeaks an origin that is unique and an authorship which, while truly human, is also as truly divine.

The New Testament more than sustains this character. It describes One of whom the ancient prophets spoke, for whom the ancient saints of God, in wearied patience, looked. "As it is

written" is its frequent refrain. The Bethlehem manger presents, in its beginnings, the realized promise of waiting ages. Along the norms of human childhood, the Child to manhood grew. By and by, the dove descends and the Messiah stands forth complete. The audacity of an impostor in all this is absolutely out of the question. By his quiet, conscious possession of resources surpassing those of other men, his character shines solitary as it is sublime. He makes no unseemly haste to declare his mission or to proclaim himself divine; yet he suffers no opportunity to pass in which a mock modesty might conceal from men that he is indeed the Son of God. Nicodemus comes at night to cross-question him concerning his miracles, and, with a spiritual insight into the relations of things that is amazing, he answers that the kingdom of heaven means a newborn life. In Solomon's porch, the Jews met him squarely with the challenge, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly," and, seeing that true faith is built upon more than a single word, he quietly refers them to his teachings and his works. Asked if he be the King of the Jews, modestly but affirmatively he answers, "Thou sayest." They justly charge any man with blasphemy who would presume to forgive sin, and yet to the palsied man he said: "Thy sins be forgiven thee." And as the man, commanded so to do, took up his bed and

walked, the astonished beholders could draw their own inferences. They charge Jesus with making himself equal with God, and he meets their charge with consenting silence. They worship him, and he forbids them not. Prophets and apostles said, "Thus saith the Lord." He said, "Verily, verily, *I* say unto you." The crown of humility sat in regal majesty upon the brow of the Incarnate God.

Nor, if this is true, is this all the truth. A divine Christ was not done with mankind when he was laid away in the Arimathæan's tomb. *Resurgam!* His rising again is the burden of apostolic proclamation. The promised Guide and Comforter is come. The living Christianity of these subsequent centuries is an answering fulfillment of the divine Christ's promise. Christianity did not evaporate when the clouds received him out of the sight of the gazing men of Galilee. Pentecost was the birthplace and birth-hour of the universal Christianity, now fully come. The impulse, dating from that predicted day, and increasing in power and accomplishment with the lapse of time, is a part of the Christianity that is divine. The Christ risen is the Christ indwelling. The enthroned King is the enshrined Saviour. The sunbeam is an expression, an emanation, a part, of the sun. The magnificent career of Christianity, beginning with the conquering outbursts of apos-

tolic unction and gathering force and volume even up to this very moment, is but the predestined continuous development of the supernatural work which Jesus came to do. That work will not be done, that development will not be complete, until the redeeming purposes of grace shall have been fully consummated.

Right gladly do we view the Christianity of the nineteenth century of our era as identical with that of the days of Jesus himself and of Paul and John. No day, no event, no issue was too remote from him to be contemplated in the inauguration of his age-long work. The delays and disappointments that, in ignorant or doubting misapprehension, may embarrass his disciples are but eddies and detours in the fulfillment of his plan, while the expansions and triumphs of his kingdom are only the clearer revealings of the supernatural and the divine.

If we must answer for the character of the Christianity of the present, we may also avail ourselves of the accumulating evidences in its behalf, that are emerging in all lands to-day. Jesus appealed to his works to convince the doubting, nearly nineteen hundred years ago; but "greater works than these" are in these last days wrought on the earth in his name. Once supernatural, always supernatural; and if the Christianity of the Nazarene and of Athanasius and Polycarp and Peter was, in origin,

in power, in character, and in results, *supernatural*, then not less so is the Christianity of Luther and Knox, of Wesley and Chalmers, of Spurgeon and Moody, of Livingstone and Duff, of Judson and Nevius. The Spirit of the Lord has been upon these, his servants among men; he hath anointed them to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent them to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

This very day is this very Scripture fulfilled in our ears.

Mental causation is not reduced to physical by diluting it with duration.—MARTINEAU.

Inquiring into the pedigree of an idea is not a bad means of roughly estimating its value.—SPENCER.

The beginning and the end of what is the matter with us in these days is that we have forgotten God.—CARLYLE.

The pantheist is but a bashful atheist.—HEINE.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUPERNATURAL

Christianity itself being witness, then, it is not natural, but supernatural. The issue is clear. If it be not supernatural, it is untrue. It stakes everything on its own veracity. It cannot be at the same time only natural and wholly true.

It is quite in order to insist upon this point nowadays. We shall not presume to pass upon the right of evolution to have and to hold so large a place in modern thought, but it is presuming little indeed to say thus much: that if the Bible be true, if the words of Jesus are to be taken at their face meaning, and if the consensus of Christian people from the apostles down has any bearing upon the question, then Christianity is not the product of nature's forces; nor can it even be accounted for by all the magic and mysterious processes that are combined and labeled under the general name of evolution. Any attempt to do this in any interest whatever is conceived in error and fraught with gravest perils. When we read that "no man can run up the natural lines

of evolution without coming to Christianity at the top," and that "the facts and processes which have received the name of Christian are the continuations of the scientific order,"[1] we are equally grieved whether we regard the view of the esteemed author as, on the one hand, the degradation of Christianity, or, on the other, the apotheosis of evolution. If the Christianity of the gospels be unchanged, then surely the natural order that can produce it is greater than its product, and nature itself is therefore supernaturalized.

It is extremely doubtful whether this is either good science or good theology. Indeed, if it were one, it would need only the transposition to appear as the other. Certainly the consensus of scientists is no more with the science of it than is that of the theologians with its theology. If this is the "new testament of evolution," then Mr. Darwin and Mr. Wallace were the Moses and Aaron of the old dispensation, and the chosen race seem, with true Hebraistic pertinacity, to decline the gospel of the new era. Prof. Huxley refuses to see any ethical possibilities in the cosmic order. Mr. Darwin saw *egoism* only, and the egoism he saw is nothing if not the death of altruism. This new testament of evolution is not a "fulfillment," but a contradiction of the old, and hence it is that biological evolution can

[1] Prof. Drummond's *The Ascent of Man*, pp. 342–3.

scarcely claim the parentage of an altruistic, love-born, love-inculcating Christianity.

Just here is the crucial test point of present-day apologetics. We must be on our guard alike against an avowed opponent who would gain his end not by assailing Christianity immediately, but by eviscerating the supernatural, and against a sincere friend who, under cover of sympathy with doubt, would practically abandon every distinctive position worth contending for.

To relinquish the supernatural is to forsake evangelical Christianity: for, if it be not supernatural, it is not what it has been believed to be; it is not what it represents itself to be. "The Christianity that is become a part only of nature, or is classified under nature, is Christianity extinct."[1]

The idea of the supernatural is purely relative. Its meaning waits upon the definition of nature. The Duke of Argyll includes *man* in nature, thus giving the term its widest import, embracing all that is

> "In the round ocean and the living air
> And the blue sky *and in the mind of man.*"[2]

Dr. Bushnell defines nature so as to exclude man, seeing that his will is a self-initiating effi-

[1] Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 21.

[2] Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey.*

ciency. Plainly, therefore, Bushnell makes man supernatural, while the Duke of Argyll does not. Many, with Dr. Harris of Yale, regard the dividing line as that between the personal and the impersonal.[1] This makes man supernatural. The tendency of a purely physical science, attempting the impossible feat of breaking away from metaphysics, is to enlarge the realm of nature until its correlative has reached the vanishing point. Materialism repudiates the supernatural in its very first assumption. A naturalistic evolution pushes it farther and farther into the background. Mr. Spencer may not say with Moleschott, "No thought without phosphorus," but he *does* say that thought and feeling and will are higher evolution points in the nerve life, and so *of course* Mr. Spencer would scorn to agree with Dr. Bushnell. The whole scale of possible views, from that which makes everything supernatural to the absolute zero point of universal naturalism, has been traversed in the ranges of modern thought. If nature is *the all*, then there is no supernatural; or if all that is is supernatural, then there is no nature. Both views are false in themselves and evil in effect. It is said that God is everywhere, and, wherever God is, his ever-active energy is at work; and so, in the rolling of the ocean, the whirling of a planet,

[1] *The Self-revelation of God*, p. 84.

and the tinting of a rose-leaf, the divine Energy is as truly at work as in the creation of a world or the calming of a Galilæan storm. Or, shifting our standpoint, we are told to contemplate the sphere of second causes, and, remembering the rigid uniformity of their operation, that we are able to reduce to a strictly scientific formula the slow formation of a crystal in the earth, the appearance of a star world in space, and the emergence of a new species in animated nature, as well as the evolution of a civilization and the moral and spiritual achievements of a human race. All that is, they say, is nature's product. Nature works by laws. Science traces those laws, and, as men's perceptions are quickened and their minds are widened, they are more and more subduing the whole field of knowable truth and reducing it to the cold tabulated schedules of scientific knowledge.

There is a vast difference between the notion that God is *in* everything and that God *is* everything. The one says that God is every *what*, and the other that God is every *where*. God is omnipresent. His infinite being fills immensity. His cosmical energy is never-resting. All second causes are God's forces, not less efficient because their efficiency is not self-originated, but derived from God. All that is is, because he sustains it.

A creature would cease to be a creature the moment it became absolutely independent of its Creator. God's immanent power shimmers in the sunbeam, trembles in the aspen leaf, and whistles in the night storm. God is the hidden efficiency in all the processes of nature.[1] He sent the storm into the sea, he prepared the fish, he prepared the gourd, he prepared the worm that smote the gourd, and he brought all this to bear upon the moral discipline of the runaway preacher, the son of Amittai. He clothes the grass of the field, he feeds the ravens when they cry, and not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice. His power upholds, his presence fills, the universe; but we shall not therefore say he *is* the universe.

Strange as it may seem, it is true that Christian faith to-day, in its rebound from a God-exiling materialism, is in actual danger of falling off backward into the mire of pantheism. A neo-Hegelian philosophy would fain usher in a new reign of the God-intoxicated Spinoza. To identify the natural and the supernatural is either, on the one hand, to deny the former and to become what the technicist would call an acosmic pantheist—all God and no world—or, on the other hand, to deny the latter and to become an atheistic pancosmist—all world and no God. The former obliterates science and

[1] See Psalm civ.

makes all knowledge theology; the latter obliterates theology and makes all knowledge natural science.

Materialism is an exploded theory to-day. It would appear that we are on the verge of an era of revived metaphysics. Men are seeing again that all physics back up against metaphysics. Signs will fail if the great battles of faith and unbelief in the next score of years are not fiercest upon questions of psychology and personality and rationality.

Idealism is rising again into the ascendant, but logically idealism is often the metaphysical name for pantheism. Spinoza had his defender in Hegel, and Spencerian evolution is a sort of revival of their faith. It is not atheism that is to be feared from that quarter, it is *akosmism;* but the one is as bad as the other. Dr. Edward Caird says: "Hegel rightly answered those who accused Spinoza of atheism, by saying that he was not an atheist, but an 'akosmist;' it was not God, but the world of finite things, whose reality he denied."[1]

To be sure, not a few would promptly refuse to be held to such a philosophy as that, plainly stated; but precisely that is their underlying philosophy when they say, with an air of ethereal devoutness which a certain wing of recent litera-

[1] *The Evolution of Religion*, i. 104.

ture is rather fond of affecting, "Oh, *everything* is supernatural."

This doctrine of the supernatural is the irrepressible postulate of human thought. Emmanuel Swedenborg taught his strange and not unfascinating theory of *correspondences* between the natural and the supernatural. Bishop Butler argued his doctrine of *analogy* between them. The Duke of Argyll, agreeing with Babbage in his famous Bridgewater treatise, regards the workings of the supernatural as only the outworkings of the *occult and unknown* laws of nature, thus locating the miraculous rather in man's ignorance than in God's power. Professor Drummond, in his first book, took Butler's idea of analogy and pressed it boldly, but not quite convincingly, into that of absolute *identity*. Again, we are told that *telepathy*, as the generic law of all psychical activities, is the rationale of the mysterious,[1] while there are others who, subsidizing the marvels of our civilization, presume to say that *electricity*[2] is the secret for which men are hunting. John H. Jamieson, in a somewhat hazy book, announces that he has found the right solution in the *reciprocity* or *coördination* of the natural and the supernatural.[3] The favorite idea of the day seems to be

[1] See *The Law of Psychic Phenomena*, by T. J. Hudson.

[2] See Marie Corelli's *Romance of Two Worlds*, p. 286.

[3] *Christ's Idea of the Supernatural.*

that expressed by Jean Paul Richter: "The miracle on earth is nature in heaven." What is supernatural in natural spheres is natural in supernatural ones. There is a positive infatuation in this conception; its fatal weakness is in its play on the word "nature." If there is a system of *nature* in planes higher than our own, one of two things will be true of it: either it is like our system, or it is not. If it is like ours, then to carry difficulties in thought from our world to that is to shift the problem, but not to solve it. If it is not like ours, then we, ostrich-like, deceive ourselves by naming "nature" what upon the admitted hypothesis is not a *nature* at all, but something else. If we naturalize the phenomena of spheres that to us are *super*natural, what is that but harnessing the powers of the Almighty to our thought-scheme and holding him to its modes? But that is the bog of a universal naturalism which, if it have any God whatever, either, with Mr. Spencer, cannot know him, or, with the *passé* school of English Deism, places a "scientific embargo" upon his actions. Besides all this, legion is the name of those who, with contagious enthusiasm, insist that evolution is the bridge that spans the chasm between the two. But granting "the two" concedes all we are now arguing for. If evolution grants an evolver and an evolved, it has granted the basis of our position. Supernaturalism is only another

name for Theism; that is, remembering that Deism is dead, and therefore no longer worthy of respectful mention. Indeed, Deism believes in a God *above* nature. If there is a God, answering to mankind's meaning of that sacred name, then the way is open to believe in *the above-nature*. We need not define nature, except to say that it does *not* include God. It may or may not include angels or men or occult forces, but, unless we take our definitions from the obsolete lexicons of defunct materialism, nature does not include the Infinite and Eternal Personality who has created, now controls, and will control, *all nature* in accordance with his will, which is the only law creation can or does obey.

He who makes everything supernatural is as much of an enemy of Christianity as he who makes nothing supernatural. If we emphasize every word in the sentence, we lose all emphasis. The supernatural is a figment of the fancy, without the natural to which it is *super*-ior. He who calls every day in the week Sabbath has no Sabbath. He who does not work six days in the week is as guilty of breaking the fourth commandment as he who works on the seventh. There is a cant in philosophy as well as in theology or religion. He who sees God everywhere, pantheistically, is as wide of the truth as he who

sees him nowhere, atheistically. When we call all men God incarnate, and all things God embodied, we are in danger of betraying everything by affirming everything.

The only safe and sure ground is that of sound Scripture and sober science and common sense, that there is a God and that there is a world. Each is distinct from the other. The world depends upon God, but God does not depend upon the world. Without God, there never would have been a world; from eternity God is, before the worlds were made.[1] The tracing of the chains of phenomena in this created world is science. The study of God as he makes his ineffable being and holy nature known transcends science.[2] There is no quarrel between the two. Their aims are different, their provinces are distinct, their subject-matter is not the same. Each throws its light upon the other, and each is itself made more complete and perfect in the revealing presence of the other. The one is natural, the other is supernatural.

[1] See Psalm xc. 1, 2.

[2] The use of the terms "theology" and "science" in this contrasted sense is not meant to imply that theology is not scientific; it is rather in accordance with the popular meaning of the word science as *natural science.*

Law, in its most general and comprehensive sense, signifies a rule of action and is applied indiscriminately to all kinds of action, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational.—BLACKSTONE.

After all which has been done by the sensuous littleness, the shallow pride, and the idolatry of science, to make a total universe, or even a *God*, of nature, still it is nothing but the carpet on which we children play, and which we may use according to its design or may cut and burn and tear at will.—BUSHNELL.

The cosmos is rather an utterance than an argument.—DENISON.

Subtilitas naturæ longe superat subtilitatem mentis humanæ.—BACON.

CHAPTER V

MIRACLES

It is not in mind either clearly to define or exhaustively to prove the existence of the supernatural; we may assume what all men already believe. A philosophy that regards as only natural, the origin and development of this universal belief in the supernatural, concedes the *fact* that such belief is universal. The faith may be a superstition; its object may be a fancy; still, the faith does prevail. Without question, many rude caricatures have displaced a sober faith in the divine. There is, however, a common substratum underlying all such faith in a god or in God, from the lowest fetichism of the jungles to the purest spiritual faith of the Christian saint. A recent writer[1] has done good service in calling attention to the fact that the scientific spirit, which aims to be so comprehensive in its range and so impartial in its scrutinies, has signally failed in assigning proper importance to the religious spirit in man, and to

[1] Benj. Kidd's *Social Evolution*, p. 22, 1st ed.

its forces and institutions in society; and this, too, simply as a fact to be accounted for, and as a phenomenon to be explained. This is true. It has too often been assumed that religion is superstition, and, as such, is therefore unworthy of scientific study. But, even so, superstition is a fact, and science is disloyal to itself if it do not attend to facts. And say Christianity is a huge superstition: certainly, with the hold which it has somehow been able to get upon the human race, with the influence it has indisputably exerted upon the policies of history and upon the welfare of the nations, and with the astounding confidence that marks its attitude before the world to-day, as with undiminishing vigor it bids for the faith of men as over against the great creed-systems of the past, this stupendous phenomenon challenges the investigation of science as scarcely any other can even claim to do. Religion is the most influential factor in history; it is the most powerful force in individual character; it is the foremost fact of sociology; and that scientist is under the bondage of a prejudice more dishonoring than the superstition he fain would despise, who, for any reason whatever, refuses to the objective fact of religion its place and importance among the facts presented for his contemplation.

But faith in the supernatural is conceded to be the essential element in all religion.

The question of miracles is involved in that of the supernatural, and the question of the supernatural is involved in that of God. Mr. J. S. Mill admitted that, if there be a God, the difficulty about miracles sinks into insignificance. His logic traced unbelief to its ultimate source, but every unbeliever in miracles is not possessed of Mr. Mill's faculty for logic. Mr. J. A. Froude said that prayer is nonsense without faith in miracles and the supernatural, and, when we come to think of it, the remark is so obviously true that it seems almost unworthy to be written. Only the atheist can dismiss the supernatural.

But, granted the supernatural, many very important conclusions follow. If that supernatural something be to us dead or dumb or in the distance, then it is not above but below nature, and the gold we have been seeking is but disappointing gravel after all.

Goethe remarked: "What were a God who only gave the world a push from without or let it spin around his finger?" What Carlyle called "an absentee God" is an abdicated Sovereign of the universe. Voluntarily vacating or forcibly dethroned, the world is, on this theory, now a world without a God. English Deism was only another name for atheism *for the present.* No wonder it passed away; the wonder is that it ever had such

sway. A God whose hands are tied, whose ear is stopped, whose heart is stolid, and whose might is bound—a God whose very Deity is so divested of its Godhead as to render him as unresponsive and as helpless to his creatures' need as are the idols of Bangkok or Peking—such a God is, whether by reason of his own choice at the beginning or of the strength of laws which he has ordained, simply less than God, and the throne of the Supreme is an "untenanted throne" at the very best.

Christianity stands or falls with its miracles. Minus miracles, it would be revised into something else absolutely unlike its real self. Miracles presuppose the supernatural; and the supernatural, as men understand the term, would not be complete without miracles. The one is the cause, the other the effect. The one is the substance, the other the manifestation; the one is the power, the other its sign.

Scripture nowhere defines a miracle. Every writer is at liberty to construct his own definition. One would scarcely make "supernatural" and "miraculous" synonymous terms. The miracle of apologetics is something visible, tangible, in the field of observed fact. Saul's conversion was supernatural; but most writers, purely for considerations of convenience and clearness of speech, would not call it miraculous. "Moral miracles" are due

to supernatural workings, but we shall understand ourselves better if we avoid the ambiguous phrase. No miracle is immoral or unmoral. The new birth is due to the Spirit of God; sanctification has in it a supernatural element; these have in them very valuable evidences for the truth of Christianity, but it is better to consider them elsewhere and to confine ourselves now to miracles as phenomena in the outward world, due to the immediate efficiency of God and unsusceptible of explanation upon any basis of natural order or physical law.

Such a miracle is something more than the unusual or the strange. A snowflake might be a marvel to a prince within the tropics, or a steam-engine to a chief of the Dakotahs. Their ignorance pronounces these "miracles." Then why may not *our* ignorance pronounce floating axes and rising dead men miracles? Our knowledge, rather, pronounces them so. If in some other zone it should be found that iron floats on water, and buried dead men rise up and live, in accordance with laws as commonly observed and as well understood as those by which we understand the falling of the snowflake and the structure of the locomotive, then indeed we should cease to call them miracles. But is it so? Can it be so? Is it believable? Is the assured knowledge of modern science only worthy to be compared with the crass

ignorance of the untutored savage? Then agnosticism is the death doom of intellectual achievement, and the more we think we know the more dense and extensive is our ignorance. The norm is not simply in our notion; it is rather in the observed uniformity. If snowflakes were, all over the world, as absolutely unknown as they are on sea levels at the equator, then perhaps we should call a few snowflakes, falling in the midst of the centuries, miracles; only, we should inquire also into the occasion or the reason for a miracle at about the time when the crystal visitor should silently fall. And so the Duke of Argyll, with others, argues that, as only a dozen snowflakes from creation to doomsday would be formed and would fall by reason of the same laws and forces in nature that now carpet the continents and cap the mountain peaks with white so lavishly that millions forget that there is anything wonderful in it all, therefore we should be slow to deny that the unusual events we now call miracles may not also be explained by certain laws of nature—if only we knew enough to know these unknown laws of nature. This view has in it a supposition which, it must be confessed, is not easy categorically to refute. Whatever plausibility it has is borrowed from the inexhaustible resources of our ignorance. It would be audacious to pronounce this view incompatible with Christianity. The

greatest objection to it is its severe draft upon our credulity. Of course, just one snowflake might have been formed as the myriads of myriads are formed. That one snowflake, though, would never have furnished a sufficient basis for believing in a *law*. We never generalize from one such observation and christen our generalization a uniform law. It takes two points to fix the direction of a straight line, and it takes many facts in nature to fix our faith in a regular uniform law. Would it not be more rational to call the one or the few snowflakes *exceptions* to a law, which law ground out something else than snowflakes? Indeed, that is the very element which makes it so conspicuous. The law is otherwise, and the *miraculum* is something for which the law does not account. All iron axes sink in water, ordinarily; that is the law. Here is one ax that does not sink in water; *it* has another law, we are told. The fact is thus admitted, and another law is posited. When living beings die, their bodies decompose and decay; that is the law. We call it a law of chemistry. Eighteen hundred years ago, that decomposing process was arrested in a few cases, under conditions that have notably interested all mankind. In these few cases, we are told, another law was in operation, bringing about these most unusual and extraordinary results. To many of us, this increases the

difficulties. We predicate unknown laws upon single and singular manifestations. The system of nature is made to have two sets of laws: the one, the object of our science; the other, the creation of our nescience. This notion seats another ruler on the throne of the universe, and the new monarch's name is *Law*. It pushes faith on into credulousness, and all to pay our tribute to the "reign of Law." It is the offspring of a certain philosophical predilection.

There is no doubt that the conquests of knowledge are curtailing the ranges of superstition. Ignorant tribes ascribe to supernatural personages what enlightened men trace to nature's laws. But there is a line beyond which this march can never go, beyond which there is a residuum of the mysterious which science gives no promise of resolving. God rules on both sides of that line. On this side, he ordinarily works by law. On that side, he may or may not; mortal wisdom cannot know. Infinite Wisdom never works at random or by chance. Rational laws, we may reverently believe, govern all his ways and works among his creatures. But the cosmos is an objective scheme of uniform actions in accordance with fixed laws. The bounds of that cosmos are for us fixed by the actions we can perceive and the uniformities we can apprehend.

Dr. Martineau somewhere says, in substance,

that it is always the case that "when people find out *how* a thing is done, they instinctively conclude that God does not do it." The believer in miracles maintains that God has sometimes acted without disclosing the *how* in the way of a uniform mode of action. As to the existence of such a law in a miracle, most believers are very skeptical; believers and unbelievers are at least agnostic. It is gratuitous to affirm the existence of a law according to which the one ax floated, the Galilæan water once "blushed into wine," the dead man in the tomb at Bethany once rose from the dead. We prefer to say that the God, who ordinarily works according to uniform law, suspended that law in each such instance. We prefer to ascribe these most remarkable events rather to the direct volition and action of Him whose will makes law and can unmake it at His pleasure, rather than to assume new laws on bases which the suspicious eye of science would elsewhere certainly regard as insufficient, and all to bind the powers of God in the all-restraining fetters of the world's vicegerent, LAW.

The biblical conception of miracles may be gathered from some of the leading terms employed to designate them. In the Old Testament it is (1) *something separated* from other things, i. e., something singular, uncommon, obviously distinguished from the common run of things. (2) It

is a *sign* to confirm some teaching or pretension. (3) It is a *power*, the cause being put for the effect, and the supernatural efficiency, whose manifestation it is, being brought to the front.

In the New Testament it is (1) a *wonder*. Here the name is taken from the astonishment produced in the beholder's mind. We have adopted the Latin equivalent, *miraculum*. Archbishop Trench has observed that it is a pity that both the German and English languages have seized upon a subordinate phase of the New Testament idea of miracle at the expense of more essential elements. It may astonish the observer, but to stop there is to lose its highest ethical effect upon the spectator and its deepest spiritual significance in the Christian system. (2) It is a *sign*. This indispensable signatory element attests its connection with and production by the supernatural. It exists not in itself nor for its own sake, but for the sake of something else. It marks the insignia of Heaven's royalty, it is the sign-manual of the ever-living God. (3) It is a *power*, *mighty works*, or simply *works*. It may astonish weak men, but it is the easy, natural activity of Omnipotence. Supernatural works are but the natural doings of the supernatural Worker.

In the light of all this, he is a poor defender of Christianity who does not regard miracles as events in the outside world, cognizable by the senses of men.

Nor, again, is he a better who regards a miracle as a mere haphazard or disconnected thing. The power of miracles is not subject to the spirit of the prophets or to the whim of the apostles. The question in hand settles down to the question of a revelation of God to man. A miracle is an occasional shining through the veil of natural uniformity of the divine Presence and Power, in a way out of the ordinary, to seal certain teachings and to accomplish certain ends. That first miracle at Cana, Jesus did "and *manifested forth* his glory, and his disciples believed on him." These words give us at once the essential idea of a miracle—the showing forth of the glorious God, and the evidential import which it involves—that men may believe. Every miracle is, in its way, a theophany; in its way, strikingly unusual, obviously perceptible, and significantly suggestive of a permanent, controlling, powerful Personality who can and does do as he wills.

It is not necessary to delineate accurately and fully all the elements involved in miracles, in order to bring out their evidential force. This attesting significance, however, is essential. If it were lacking, a miracle[1] would be a chance event; but one stray chance event argues a universe of chance,

[1] *Miraculum*, in itself a little thing, parceled off from the whole of nature.

and, in such a universe, a miracle is inconceivable. The coincidence of a fact with an occasion is the core of the *miraculum*, the little thing. The fact itself, however *outré*, is not enough. The claim itself, however plausible, is not enough. The one certifies the other, and in turn is interpreted by it.

There is no denying that the Scriptures and historical Christianity have laid great stress upon these miracles as proofs of the truth of the Christian religion. Moreover, without dispute, our Lord repeatedly did the same. Early apologetics accordingly made much of the "external evidences," and yet it has so happened that these very miracles, while supposed to prove Christianity true, have had to be proven true themselves. Some have said that, instead of easing the burden of the truth, they have made that burden very much heavier to be borne. This idea has been quite in favor latterly. Not a few make bold to say that Christianity would be more easily defensible without than with its miracles—forgetting, to be sure, that, as we have seen, Christianity without its miracles is not Christianity. Mr. Froude, and many of his stamp, insist very strongly upon this view. Matthew Arnold, in his memorable remark that, if the pen in his hand should be immediately turned into a penwiper, it would not make the sentiment he was writing one whit more true, meant to emphasize the same idea. It is almost incredible that such a

man as Mr. Arnold should have allowed himself to make such an observation. What an utterly childish view of a miracle! How like that of the "Philistines" whom he is so fond of soundly trouncing! He could not have imagined a better illustration of what Christian miracles are *not*. Was it not just such a sign which the Pharisees and the Sadducees sought, and did not the great Miracle-Worker brand such sign-seekers as "a wicked and adulterous generation"?

Rationalism haughtily declares that no sensible phenomenon can be accepted as a *note* or proof of a spiritual truth. One writer has gone so far as to say: "If miracles were, in the estimation of a former age, among the chief *supports* of Christianity, they are at present among the main *difficulties* and hindrances to its acceptance."[1] Sin and salvation, God and holiness, are essentially true, and nothing outside of them is relevant as testimony to their truth. In this way it has come about that not the opponents of Christianity only but also many who are in sympathy with its teachings and who even stand as champions of its truth, distinctly disparage miracles and regard them rather as impedimenta than as weapons in its warfare with unbelief.

It is more than possible that the conceded element of truth in this view has received undue

[1] Powell's *Study of the Evidences of Christianity*, p. 140.

emphasis, as a reaction and result from a perversion of the proper function of miracles in the scale of Christian evidence. Of course, an abstract truth is not made more or less true by any extraneous circumstance whatever. But an abstract truth, taking form in historic fact, may evince or evidence itself as true by means of certain germane and appropriate phenomena in the sensible world, whose occurrence and occasion and significance are made utterly pointless, inexplicable, contradictory, except on the assumption of that abstract truth which they sign and seal. The principles of the atonement are abstract and eternal, but Calvary with its cross reveals and confirms them. Immortality is an abstraction, but the resurrection of Jesus made it not more true, but more evident. "God is love," and it is no abuse of language to say that his unspeakable gift proves it. It is the distinguishing feature of Christianity that its abstract doctrines are convertible into historic truth. The doctrine of the incarnation has its man Jesus, Immanuel; love has its cross, immortality its first Easter morning, spiritual power its Pentecost, and sanctification its elect saints.

A truth revealed is a truth made concrete. A God who eternally hides himself would leave his darkened creatures a race of atheists. No heavens would declare his glory, no firmament

show forth his handiwork. Salvation from sin means power to save; but potential power that is always *only* potential is an abstraction and cannot be known to be a fact. Every fact in gospel history is luminous with its gospel meaning. The doubting Thomas is not asked to believe simply the fact that Jesus rose from the dead; he is to believe that Jesus was *such a man as could and did rise from the dead.*

There is nothing forced or strained about the miracles of the canon. Indeed, it were strange if there were no miracles. If hypnotism or occultism or evolution should demonstrate Bible miracles to be natural, the next step the demonstrator would take would be to call for some real evidence that Christianity is divine. But if Jesus Christ was divine, we should expect his life to be tuned accordingly. Granted a Shakespeare, we expect Shakespearean prodigies in his writings; granted a Napoleon, we expect Napoleonic stratagems in his career; granted a Lincoln, we expect the quaint sayings and wise doings of a Lincoln; granted a Christ—in thought, in aim, in spirit, far above the levels of mankind—we expect a life, a work, a death, Christlike. Divine doings are the things we easily expect at the hands of One who himself is divine.

If Jesus was not divine, his attested miracles

multiply the mysteries of his life. It is as good history as that Rome fell, that he both did miracles and that he said he did them. Others, before and since, did wonders by a power they distinctly disclaimed as their own; he did them by his own power. That power simply *worked;* his easy control of nature's forces was displayed, his normal superhuman selfhood simply acted, and miracles were recorded as the result. Not simply to prove himself divine did he work miracles, but because he was divine; and now they prove it. He would have been less than himself if he had done less than he did. Every man's life is his character in terms of linear measurement. Goethe says: "Man can never know how anthropomorphic he is." He is all man-like, in spite of himself. Christ was Christomorphic—Christ-like; he was *Himself.*

Not merely is the great doctrine of the incarnation vindicated to the reason by the angelic chorus heralding the approaching birth to the Judæan shepherds as they watched their flocks by night; not merely are the eternal truths of atonement for sin sealed by the historical death and resurrection of the Son of Mary; not merely is his sovereignty in the realm of nature proved to the world by his calming the lake storm or turning the water into wine; not merely is the precious teaching that sin may be forgiven by the sinless Man of history

clinched by his bidding the paralytic sinner take up his bed and walk: but also—and chiefly, if you please—the recorded fact that the strange portent announced at midnight to the astonished shepherds was followed by the birth at Bethlehem as it had been foretold; the admitted fact that Jesus did die as he himself predicted, with explanations of his death that the manner of it verified, and that he did rise from the dead as he said he would, while yet his hearers were too dull and doubting to catch the meaning of his words; the fact that, again and again, with no apparent difficulty, but more easily than the expert does his work in his laboratory, he did quiet storms, multiply loaves, heal the sick, and raise the dead; the historical fact that the palsied man did take up his bed and walk, at that particular moment, in obedience to that particular command, and coincident with that particular conversation concerning his power to forgive sin—all this assuredly does make it evident that this strange and anomalous Person is most explicable upon the simple presumption that what he said about himself is true, and that, in the light of his own plain and sober teachings, too noble for an impostor and too sane for a fanatic, it is easier to believe him to be the promised Messiah, the incarnate Logos, than anything else which impartial reason can pronounce concerning him.

It is not intended to deny that the miracles of Bible history had a distinctly telic or purposive value. Their purpose was undisguisedly evidential—they were "signs." They proved something to be true. Shakespeare's productions prove Shakespeare's genius; Jesus' doings prove Jesus' divinity, and they were intended so to prove. The miracles of Jesus were a concession to the weakness of the human reason. Thomas saw and believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed! The proud intellect of the world may decline such a concession, but the humble seeker after truth finds in this that which makes it most Christian, most Christlike, most divine. Christ "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Possibly the unfallen seraphim need not the miracles that convinced the doubt of a Thomas; but then, Christianity is not for unfallen seraphim. If the miracles are a concession, salvation is a concession, the cross is a concession, Jesus Christ is a concession, Christianity is a concession.

It is indeed unseemly that, when God condescends to our low estate, we should haughtily spurn his condescension.

John Foster says: "Miracles are the great bell of the universe, which draws men to God's sermon."

Rather, they are a part of the sermon. Still, the bell is not for its own sake; it rouses the indifferent and reminds the forgetful. Yielding to its kindly call, men come and receive the richer blessings of eternal life. But some there are who spurn these bells as a harsh interruption of their quiet reflections upon the truth itself. "Miracles," they say, "are merely the bells to call primitive peoples to church. Sweet as the music they once made, modern ears find them jangling and out of tune, and their dissonant notes scare away pious souls who would fain enter the temple of worship."[1]

> "You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs,
> To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,
> And check the careless step would spoil their birth;
> But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go.
> . . . This book's fruit is plain,
> Nor miracles need prove it any more."[2]

And so Christianity has educated men away from itself! Its miracles are only for the kindergarten stage of faith! They are crutches to be thrown away after men have learned by the use of them to walk alone! Can it be that Christianity is of God, and that its Author made a mistake? Can it be that in this age of intellectual achievement, this age of reason, the method of Infinite Wisdom, in revealing its truth to men, is out of date or has

[1] Pres. Schurman's *Agnosticism and Religion*, p. 51.

[2] See Dr. John Watson's *The Mind of the Master*, p. 146.

gone amiss? If Goethe meant it when he said that miracle is faith's own dearest child, then is faith's maturity to be signalized by the sorest bereavement it can know? Are the pedagogics of Jesus obsolete, and are miracles indeed scarecrows to nineteenth-century inquirers after truth? Has the world outgrown the Christianity of the New Testament—the Christianity of Christ? Has the moral tone of mankind so advanced as to require no "bells" to summon them to the oracles of truth, to attract them through their senses to the lofty verities that are above the sway of sense, and to win them to the Holy Temple where the Most High condescends to reveal himself to all who would worship him in spirit and in truth?

The seat of law is the bosom of God, and the voice of law is the harmony of the world.—HOOKER.

If the merit of the order of nature lies in its use, there is no reason why it should not be suspended if there is use in suspending it.—MOZLEY.

The loose and unscientific use of this single term (evolution) has done as much as any other single cause to introduce error into current theories of nature, of man, and of human history.—SHEDD.

Shalt thou give law to God? Shalt thou dispute with him the points of liberty? Who made thee what thou art, and formed the powers of heaven such as he pleased, and circumscribed their being?—MILTON.

CHAPTER VI

THE RIGHT OF MIRACLES TO OCCUR

The stock objection to miracles is that they are impossible. This is not an argument or an evidence, but an *ipse dixit.* David Friedrich Strauss, in his famous first edition of his *Leben Jesu,* laid down these three principles in substance as fundamental: 1. The supernatural is unhistorical. 2. The unpsychological is impossible. 3. When there are two discrepant accounts of the same event, *both* are untrustworthy. This has at least the merit of being very clear. Others have accepted these principles, but have been less candid in avowing them. The first is virtual atheism; the second is another way of putting the first, and the third is utter nonsense and was simply meant to sweep the New Testament out of court.

To call miracles impossible is to beg the whole question. What would be thought of that court which is about to try a man for crime, and, while the man is awaiting trial and the advocates and witnesses are ready to proceed, the judge estops the whole proceeding with the remark, "It is im-

possible that this man should be a criminal"? Or what would be thought if the attorney for the accused should rise, and, without waiting to ask or move that the case be dismissed, announce in authoritative manner that his client did not commit the crime of which he was accused, he *could not* have committed it or any other crime, because it is *impossible that any man should commit any crime?* This may be an easy way of dispensing justice, but it is a certain way of dispensing *with* justice. This is the system of jurisprudence by which the question of miracles is settled by the dictum that the supernatural is impossible. It shuts off all evidence. It is dogmatism gone mad. Only supernatural intelligence could absolutely affirm the impossibility of the supernatural. Dogmatic agnosticism means omniscience assumed, and dogmatic antisupernaturalism poses in the role of the very thing which it denies.

It is the important duty of the historian to deal with facts, but it is the transcendent office of the philosopher to deal with possibilities. The latter is too serenely exalted to be vexed with paltry questions of evidence. He confines his august powers to "*high priori*" paths, and smiles, with an imperial smile of pity, at the naïve folly of those who innocently wait for facts before they formulate their conclusions.

Theology is often credited with the lion's share

of dogmatism, but really this is unapproachable. Not content with calling us mistaken in believing that there ever has been a miracle, it calls us idiots for believing that there ever could have been one.

Begging the pardon of our contented philosopher, we must still maintain that the question of miracles is at least an open one. Mr. Froude is entirely fair in saying: "The question about miracles is simply one of evidence—whether in any given case the proof is so strong that no room is left for mistake, exaggeration, or illusion, while more evidence is required to establish a fact antecedently improbable than is sufficient for a common occurrence."[1]

It is best frankly to admit that the presumption in each particular case is in favor of the natural. It is easier to believe in the sample than in the exception. We are now not philosophers, but historians, and so we are not rising to consider the great truth that with man as is man, with the world as is the world, and with God as we know him, there is indeed an indisputable antecedent probability that God would rive the clouds and make himself manifest to his distressed creatures; we are only saying that, in considering the evidence that any event is miraculous, that evi-

[1] *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, i: 187.

dence must be sufficient to overcome a just and decided presumption in the mind to the contrary. Nature, by its usual modes, has taught us to expect those modes. We are surprised at anything else, and Dean Mozely truly tells us there is always an element of doubt in surprise. The miracle is something strange; that is one thing that makes it a miracle. It astonishes the beholder, and it is preposterous to say that the presumption, in every specific instance in a thousand, is in favor of that one being the one exception rather than one of the remaining nine hundred and ninety-nine. All other axes have sunk in water, and the presumption is that the prophet's ax did likewise. Wheat has been sown in the earth, has grown and been harvested and gathered and garnered and ground and baked into bread for thousands of years, and the probability is that all bread has been made in that same way. That Jesus multiplied the loaves to feed the hungry multitude needs strong proof, or it is right to reject it.

The uniformity of nature, then, does not disprove miracles; it only throws the burden of proof against them. Mr. Hume was right thus far. He insisted that the testimony for miracles must be so strong that its falsehood would be more incredible than the miracle to which it testifies. It comes down to miracle against miracle.

Very well! That is not so unfair, after all. Only, Mr. Hume immediately proceeds to remark that no such testimony exists. Without stating and weighing the evidence at all, it was Hume the philosopher, and not Hume the historian, who decided the question at last. He did discuss the alleged miracles of Vespasian in Egypt, and Cardinal de Retz in Spain, and at the tomb of Abbé Paris in France; he considered the evidence in one case and proceeded to pass judgment upon another case. "It is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages." Any man who could write that might well regard true testimony as so "strange" that he might at least "hope" it to be incredible. We are to bear in mind, though, that while uniformity raises a presumption against exceptions, that uniformity is a necessary condition to the exceptions. The exception proves the rule in this, that if there were no rule to be broken, there could be no exception by breaking it. Nature's uniformity is presupposed in the miracle. We have no objection to offer to any proper argument in showing nature's methods regular and uniform, for such argument is only establishing one of the *conditiones sine qua non* of the miracle itself. It is because ordinary events *are* ordinary that extraordinary events have any peculiar significance. Without the normal, there can be no abnormal; without the common, there can be no

uncommon; without the natural, there could be no supernatural.

But as to the protest that it is unreasonable to believe in miracles, something remains to be said. The objector often means that man's belief in the order of nature is so universal and so powerful that it is *irrational* to believe in anything whatsoever which does not take its place in that order.

It will not escape notice that this view still keeps the question remote from the region of fact. It is rather psychological, philosophical, than scientific or historical.

But where do we get this belief in the order of nature? Does an event not classable among the ordinary events of nature so outrage our reason as to make the belief in it irrational? To believe twice two to be five would be, in this sense, irrational. To believe that a curved line traces a shorter distance between two points than a straight line, would also. Is believing in a black swan or a floating rock in the same sense irrational? Is faith in any fact that is not orderly or ordinary absolutely unreasonable? Not at all. What we call the order of nature is believed in upon altogether different grounds from those on which we accept mathematical axioms. We gather our ideas of nature from experience, but we do not call what is at variance with our experience so unrea-

sonable that upon the good word of others we cannot believe it, although *we* have never experienced it. Unless we are out-and-out empiricists—and we are not,—unless with John Stuart Mill we hold that every man, in his own individual experience, has accumulated his entire stock of codes and creeds; or unless, with Herbert Spencer, we avail ourselves of heredity and simply extend our own experience into that of the race; then we must admit that there is a world of difference between the ground of our faith in the straight-line axiom and our belief that water invariably tends to go in straight lines to its lowest level. Even Spencer and Mill bring no relief, for so far are they from holding that our faith in the laws of nature is raised to the dignity of our faith in what we call necessary truth, they, that on the other hand, lower the latter to the level of the former. Accordingly, for them there can be nothing so ironclad about the laws of nature. Those laws are simply what they have found, just as, they say, everything else is. We say that in this they are right so far as the laws of nature are concerned, and wrong beyond that. They see facts only; necessary truths are forbidden. This is why Mr. Balfour has truly said, "Pure empiricism has therefore no claim to be a philosophy";[1] by which he means that, content with

[1] *The Foundations of Belief*, p. 161.

taking what they find and stopping there, the idea of a philosophy with laws of thought transcending experience is absurd.

What we believe is this, namely, that our belief in some things—things we cannot but believe—is not derived from our experience, and that our belief in the uniformity or continuity of the observed laws of nature *is* derived from our experience. The former belief is reasonable in the sense that to disbelieve those things is irrational. Sane men cannot disbelieve them. The latter belief is reasonable in the sense that it is inferred from observed facts, and that, wanting those facts, the belief could be suspended without any violence whatever to the constitution of our reason or to the organic laws of our thought. We have no reason for believing that the sun will rise in the east to-morrow morning, or that it will rise at all, except that we know that it has been for a very long time rising every morning, and rising in the east. We have no other reason for believing that water will always fall to its lowest possible level than that, so far as we know, it always has done so. It would not throw our thought processes fatally out of gear if water should change its habits and do something else. Indeed, we need only to heat it above the boiling point or cool it below the freezing point, and it does do something else; and yet we think and infer and

believe in the same way in sultry July and in frigid January.

Science first observes and then infers. It is easy to let the inferring come in before the observing. Science sees what is; it studies phenomena. When it comes into the Most Holy Place of the generalizing, law-formulating philosopher, mere science is "healthily agnostic."

To observe the present *régime* of nature, therefore, and, flushed with enthusiasm at its triumphs, to turn and declare that nothing has ever happened, nothing ever will happen, nothing *can* happen, which is different from what it has found *has* happened—this is too unscientific for true science, too unphilosophical for true philosophy. This is induction; induction is really only expectation, expectation based on probabilities, but a universe of probabilities does not amount to a necessity. To-morrow will probably come as to-day came. It may not. It is improbable that it will not; but the improbable is not the impossible, the self-contradictory—otherwise time is eternal and the succession of days and nights can never end. Coleridge says: "Like the stern lights of a ship, experience illuminates only the track over which it has passed." Prof. Huxley has spoken on this point, and this is what he says in discussing gravitation as a law of nature according to which some

have said stones must fall to the ground: "But when, as commonly happens, we change 'will' into 'must,' we introduce an idea of necessity which has no warrant in the observed facts; and has no warranty that I can observe elsewhere. For my part, I utterly repudiate and anathematize the intruder. Fact I know and law I know, but what is this necessity but an empty shadow of the mind's own throwing?"[1]

Mr. Buckle says that the aim of science is to predict the future. The value of its predictions must always be contingent upon the perpetuity of the methods which it finds to be in vogue. How long they will continue, neither Mr. Buckle nor any other man can say. Science excuses herself from announcing that they are eternal. Lord Kelvin has told us that the sun's heat is slowly dying out and that the present astronomic clock gives promise of one day running down. Even Mr. Spencer's cycle theory of alternating evolutions and dissolutions implies a lapse of the whole present cosmic order. Nor is science altogether silent. She may be summoned to testify that, from the best of her knowledge and belief, the laws of nature are not quite so rigidly uniform as some make out. Geology reveals tremendous upheavals as well as prolonged epochs of gradual growth.

[1] *Lay Sermons*, p. 158.

Biology—or, as President Jordan prefers to call it, "bionomics"—reveals hiatuses which the most ardent evolutionist has hardly been able to account for. If matter is not eternal, there was an abrupt break when the worlds were made. Science repudiates spontaneous generation, and when those first vital germs appeared there was a breach in the order of the uniform. Mr. Spencer tries to show that it was so easy for the inorganic to slide (upward) into the organic, that, before it knew it, the slip had been made. The great philosopher nodded long enough to mistake *ease* for *efficiency*—because it was so easy to do it, it just did it; and wise men are smiling at the audacity of his fancy. Uniformity fails to explain the very things that need explaining. If it ever began, it broke its own record, and so it may break it again *eo facto* in the ending. Science says it is not eternal, either *ante* or *post*. Uniformity tells us "how," and even that only for the present. It answers to the reason's "Why?" nothing which makes it irrational or impossible to believe in things which it cannot provide for. It dare not say these minds of ours cannot think and feel and choose in other worlds than this, in other realms than this where now we find that iron axes sink in water and lifeless bodies return into their formless dust.

Uniformity fails to explain the emerging of the vegetable from the inorganic, of the animal from

the vegetable, of the rational and moral from the animal. In the world of character, spontaneous regeneration is as unknown as spontaneous generation in the world of nature. *Omne vivum ex vivo.* The life of the Christian man, the life of Jesus Christ, is utterly inexplicable on the basis of the uniform action of their antecedents. "When science can produce bacteria from ammonia and water, change any lower creature into a responsible being, construct a Christ out of a man consciously guilty, then and only then can she afford to speak slightingly of miracles."[1]

[1] Dr. A. H. Strong's *Philosophy and Religion*, p. 142.

One of the impossibilities is, having made man free, to compel him to act as if he were necessitated.—FAIRBAIRN.

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.—ST. PAUL.

Social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step, and the substitution for it of another which may be called the ethical process.—HUXLEY.

The incarnation discovers to man the greatness of his misery by the greatness of the remedy that has been necessary.—PASCAL.

The development of the world is in many ways so abnormal, so disturbed, *that just on account* of this abnormity, caused by the breaking in of sin, a healing and restoring interference on the part of God evidently becomes necessary. —CHRISTLIEB.

CHAPTER VII

THE POSITIVE ARGUMENT FOR MIRACLES

It has been fully admitted[1] that, to the mere observer of facts, the presumption is in favor of the ordinary. The fact of uniformity trains the mind to expect it to continue, and, without question, the regularities discovered by science beget a sort of mental prejudice against the irregular.

But there is another standpoint than that of the scientific observer. The annals of nature are scant basis for the vaticinations of the prophet. Wider horizons embrace factors hitherto unseen, that bid fair to disturb the nice balancings of the past. The insect of a summer may die with the notion that all atmospheres are hot. The landsman of the interior may imagine the ocean to be but a large river, like that on the banks of which his life has been spent. Nor is a wider experience alone the corrector of the crude inferences of our ignorance. The astronomer sees a different sky from that of the savage; he may predict an eclipse, in every detail of time and procession, wholly unlike any ever beheld by the eye of man

[1] P. 85.

in the past. The evolution cycles of an agnostic philosophy certainly are not the teachings of the agnostic's experience. Unless we make the future the duplicate of the past, change must be the order of the days to come.

There is a view of the subject of miracles which throws all the presumption in their favor. That view is fair, necessary, and absolutely true. The Christian's faith in the supernatural has been so vigorously attacked that it has assumed the attitude or habit of fighting wholly on the defensive. It has been trained to the idea that it can go nowhere without carrying its proof in its hand, ready for presentation upon prompt and unavoidable demand. But miracles have a higher evidence. They need take no crouching attitude before men's reason. They are the corollaries of great truths which men have difficulty in declining to believe. Their claims are positive. Their evidence is not simply neutral or negative; and, seen from higher and true standpoints, they command the assent and compel the faith of thoughtful men.

Tertullian called sin the "great interloper." Every human being who opens his eyes to look about him or within him knows that there is something wrong. The very word "wrong" car-

ries in it the truth that things have been *wrung* or twisted out of plumb.

> "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!"

Hamlet's "time" was just like all men's time. The very fact that we have ideals higher than our achievements proves it. It is not a question for argument; everybody knows it, sees it, feels it. The cruel heel of man is against the hated serpent's head. In sorrow and pain are the generations born into the world; in weakness and struggle do they beat their uncertain paths, and in the helplessness of a common mortality do they pass off into the great unseen. Thorns and thistles are the crops which the accursed earth brings forth, and in the sweat of his face does man eat his bread until unto his native dust he does return.

The failures of nature are, to the successes, as men judge, as thousands to one. It is the exceptional seed that grows into the plant, the favored acorn that becomes a spreading oak. Nature's fields are beautiful, but they are a beautiful slaughterhouse. It is conflict, struggle, competition, life or death, kill and eat or starve and die. If the world shows benevolence, it shows malevolence also; if there is contriving kindness, there is conspiring cruelty too, and we cannot charge

Mr. J. S. Mill with entire insincerity in his difficulties concerning this turning point of his doubt.

Nor is human history charged with an altogether different meaning. War, carnage, intrigue, oppression, inhumanity, injustice, deceit, ingratitude—these and such as these are enough to give a dark coloring to the brightest pictures of the past. The best civilizations of antiquity made woman a chattel, used human slaves as beasts of burden, and turned educated, refined men into food for mad beasts and fuel for the consuming flames. The scenes of sin have not yet disappeared. We thank God for the undisputed triumphs of Christianity, the mighty victories of the gospel, and they are great and many; but he shouts too soon who imagines that the cruel ravages of sin have yet ceased to blight the race. The writer once heard Mr. Spurgeon begin a sermon with this sweeping remark, "The course of our fallen race has been a succession of failures," followed by perhaps ten minutes in a decidedly pessimistic vein. Then, pausing to take breath, he burst forth with this proposition, "All good in human history is marked by the interposition of Almighty God;" and then followed the bright and glowing optimism of the gospel.

We are not anxious just now to call that of which we speak *sin*. The philosopher calls it evil; the jurist calls it crime; the ethicist calls it

vice; the philanthropist calls it infirmity; the educator calls it ignorance. The Bible calls it sin, but it is the thing and not the name we are considering, and it is safe to say that there never was a time when there was a more unanimous vote that the thing exists than to-day. Science looks elsewhere in the dictionary for what the theologian calls total depravity, and quickly finds it. Heredity makes it a thing of the race, and not simply of the individual. The statesman must count on original sin, and political economy is sheerest fancy if it forgets the cruel reign of self.

All this is taught by those who interpret it as the age-long upward struggle of the evolving and emerging human race. We are told that all good in man, as he now is, is so much gain above his first estate, and that all bad in him is but the lingering of the scant moral capital with which he began his career. Beginning at the brute, he is aiming at the saint, and he is now somewhere about the midway point on the tedious journey. The civilization of man is but another name for the domestication of the beast, and, as we "let the ape and tiger die," sanctification proceeds.

This theory of civilization has very serious presuppositions. Either the brute was a potential man before its arrival at manhood, or it was not. If it was, then its elevation was only the asser-

tion of its real nature and was an apparent elevation only. Accordingly brutes to-day may be potential men, and the creeds of metempsychosis must be adjusted to the Christian's faith; or, on the other hand, if the brute was not a potential man at the beginning, either its bruteship had self-changing powers of its own—which could hardly be maintained, for we know that the leopard cannot change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin—or something without the brute *ab extra* must have changed him. That changing something must have been above the brute, for transforming forces in the world of character are forces that are higher, greater, stronger than the things they change. But there was no force, according to the hypothesis, in the created world, higher than this brute-man still tarrying in the dusky twilight of his manhood. Any higher force to change him was the force that created him, and that is only the evolutionist's interpretation of what some of us have called *sanctification*. It is from without; it is from above; it works within. It saves its object, they say, from brute to man; we say, from sinner to saint.

Drop the differences just now, and let us note the things in common. Stalwart evolutionists do not much believe in the sanctifying forces of the evolutionary process. Prof. Huxley says there are no ethical elements in the cosmical process. "Evolution encourages no millennial expectations." Be-

sides this, he certainly has no very high notion of the intrinsic goodness of man, when he tells us that, as to falling in with the Positivistic deification of humanity, he would as soon worship a "wilderness of apes." There are few more pessimistic passages in all literature than that in which he begins with these words: "I know of no study which is so unutterably saddening as that of the evolution of humanity, as it is set forth in the annals of history," and ends with these, "The best men of the best epochs are simply those who make the fewest blunders and commit the fewest sins."[1]

Most believers in evolution are not very strenuous believers in "millennial hopes" born of evolution. They see the night, but they are blind to any dawn. They see the seething, struggling, possibly aspiring mass, but they see neither an uplifting force within the mass, nor yet a Force without to lift it up.

The Force without is the only conceivable origin whence deliverance from their sin can come to men.

But, we are asked, if God made man in creation, and now has to remake him in redemption, was not his first creation a failure? If God is called upon to *restore* humanity to the condition

[1] *Nineteenth Century*, Feb., 1889.

in which God first placed him, but which man forfeited and lost, then is not Christianity an effort to make the best of a great disappointment?

Dr. Johnson once said: "There are objections against a *plenum*, and objections to a *vacuum*; but one of them must be true." Either there is a God who created and controls man, or there is not. Certain difficulties face us on the supposition that there is; vastly more and greater difficulties meet us on the supposition that there is not. We must never suppose that every position to which can be offered an objection that we are unable to answer is consequently false, for there may be fewer objections to that than to any other position.

"The sum of all is: Yes, my doubt is great; my faith's still greater: then my faith's enough." In intellectually weighing evidences upon themes high and deep, these words may often describe the honest inquirer's frame.

And yet there are glimpses of relief. We can think of the Eternal God contemplating the creation of dependent beings. A cold lifeless world is but a feeble expression of his holy purpose, his divine thought. A universe of sentient beings is a higher expression. The highest possible, we may dare say, would be species of beings on whom his own ineffable being, in image, is impressed. That image involves self-consciousness and moral

responsibility, the outline marks of similitude in the Personality that is divine in God and human in us. Moral responsibility involves powers of intellection, reflection, decision, volition, choice, direction, action. To make his creatures less than that is to be content with a universe devoid of intelligences able to apprehend the character of their Creator; empty of beings capable by their own free will of achieving anything, except as the stars in the sky or the cattle in the field can be said to achieve; barren of spirits, angelic or human, in whose companionship his own Spirit could take delight, in whose reciprocal affection his own being, which is Love, could find its self-communicating and ever-blessed complacency.

But the creation of such a being has its risks. His will is no will if it be less than free. As the Bampton lecturer for 1894 tersely says: "The freedom of the will is the very nerve of personality."[1] He *may* go wrong, and with that possibility is the correlate possibility of his doing nobly, grandly, godlikely right.

> "I made him just and right
> Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall."

Such creatures God chose to create and did create. That is why we are. The crisis came,

[1] *Illingworth's Personality, Human and Divine*, p. 227.

the dreadful issue followed. We shall not say, we cannot say, that God was sorry then that he had decided to make man. Here we wade out beyond our depth. Whence the spirit of evil came, or why men sinned, we cannot say. God purposed to permit what did occur. Adjusting provisions to the fallen state of man, we cannot say that salvation was an *afterthought* with God, for his purpose embraced it all. But if sin had not come, no salvation would have been needed. And so the revelation of his will, the incarnation of his Son, the atonement on the cross, and the gracious work of his Holy Spirit, are for the restoration of man to what he lost. Christianity, in one aspect of it, is the means God is using for the restoration of Paradise lost, and its work will be completed only when Paradise is regained. And in the otherwise impossible experiences of a once lost but then reclaimed race, and in the otherwise impossible manifestations of a God of infinite love, tenderness, compassion—in these we catch glimpses that are suggestive of a rationale of sin.

Now, it is too much to say that, since man sinned, God was bound to save. Man had his chance; he knew the consequences; he chose, he acted. The choice of the cause implies the choice of its effect, especially when that effect is known in the making of the choice.

God owed no man the debt of restoration. That fact is what invests with heavenly significance the divine revelation which, without sin, could never have been apprehended. If both sons had stayed at home, the world would have missed the true appreciation of the prodigal son's forgiving father. There had to be a poor man by the wayside, to reveal the true nature of the Samaritan, as well as of the priest and the Levite. If man had never been lost, God could never have been known, as we know him now, in seeking and in saving.

Still, God being a God of love, in a certain reverent sense we may say he owed it to himself to provide salvation for lost men. His nature assured, prompted, provided, offered, applied, redemption. The law of a rational being, guiding and choosing his rational actions, is not automatic. There is a law of freedom, of choice itself, of the disposition that determines the choice. In this high sense is it true that there is a law in the free, sovereign, holy nature of God himself, which law is profoundly and preëminently supernatural. In the exercise of his mercy and love, we were almost saying, he could scarcely do less than he did to restore a sin-blasted, sin-blurred, sin-blighted race.

This is the positive argument for supernatural Christianity. By as much as man was made for a better state and a higher life than now are his,

by as much as a God of infinite love would be moved to provide succor for his ruined and sinking but immortal and redeemable creatures, by as much as a heavenly Father exceeds an earthly parent in love to his folly-cursed children and in resources to provide a way of return, by so much is the presumption of the empirical observer of events overbalanced and overcome by the higher presumption that, if there is a living God, he will invade the dead circles of the uniform and bring relief and life to fallen men.

Man broke the pristine charm of his innocence; but, like the chemist with the broken egg, he could not restore even the fracture of the shell. Nature is perverted, distorted, tortured, by sin. "The scheme of nature is a scheme unstrung and mistuned, to a very great degree, by man's agency in it, so as to be rather *un*nature, after all, than nature."[1] This earth is for something better than thorns and thistles; this body is for something higher than groans and pains; this soul is for something holier than jealousies and hates. What we call nature, what science calls nature, has not that in itself which will right itself. We shall never see written across the heavens, into which Napoleon said no man could look and doubt that there is a God, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever

[1] Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 46.

believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In the green fields, we shall never hear the voices of nature calling out, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Nor in the silence and solitude of the wilderness shall we hear the gentle breezes whisper, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Dr. Christlieb has said, using his words in a sense his own, but easily understood, in speaking of Christianity: "Its beginning is a miracle; its Author is a miracle; its progress depends upon miracles, and they will hereafter be its consummation."[1] Christianity de-supernaturalized is Christianity extinct. Every argument for Christianity, with its Christ, with its cross, and with its crown, is an argument for the supernatural. Granted one miracle, all philosophical difficulties disappear. As Dean Mansel truly wrote: "If any one miracle recorded in the gospels be once admitted as true, the remainder cease to have any antecedent improbability at all."[2] The chain is not as weak as its weakest link; it is as strong as its strongest link. Principal Dawson, in an address before the Evangelical Alliance recently,[3] strongly objected

[1] *Modern Doubt and Christian Faith*, p. 286.
[2] *Limits of Religious Thought*, p. 217.
[3] London, June, 1896.

to the words "natural" and "supernatural," preferring the Bible words, "natural" and "spiritual." It is a question whether the terms connote correlative ideas, but it is the thought we insist upon. If a scientist imagines that he can map out the thought and mind and love and grace of God so as to predicate such laws as he finds in nature, and predict such future events as can be based upon past experiences, then he is aspiring to infinities and aiming at impossibilities. The cross of Calvary is not simply nature's coat of arms. The love of God in Jesus Christ is something more than the law of gravitation or cohesion or affinity. A supernatural revelation is something other and more than "simply the imperative mood of nature." *Dignus vindice nodus.* The great interloper is to be overcome. The pathology of a morbid, sickly, sinful world calls out for help; and since God is neither tied nor bound by the network of laws in the world that is about us, the divine therapeutics of redemption is applied. Without the Great Physician, the sick world is doomed to death. Without Jesus Christ, man is without God and without hope in the world. With Jesus Christ, objections to minor miracles subside and disappear, and the birth and life and resurrection and redeeming work of Jesus Christ are precisely what we expect, and that is CHRISTIANITY.

Statistics is history at a standstill.—Schlözer.

The historian is the prophet looking backward.—Schlegel.

Prophecy is the expression of an ideal truth which, just because it contains an eternal law of the order of the world, also finds ever new fulfillment in all times.—Pfleiderer.

Every step by which the consciousness of mankind has emerged from the life of nature and from the rudest primitive notions of itself and the world, up to its present point of advancement, lives in the present consciousness of the race, transmuted but not annihilated.—John Caird.

CHAPTER VIII

PROPHECY

EARLY apologetics made very much of the fulfillment of predictive prophecy as an evidence of the truth of Christianity. The same tendency that has disparaged miracles has disparaged this kind of proof. And no wonder, for they are closely akin. They both appeal, we are told, to our lower faculties, and so are unworthy. This bell also, which in primitive times called men to believe, is now cracked and "jangling."

It is certainly true that prophecy is more than prediction. The historian was sometimes a prophet; the agitator, the reformer, the preacher, in ancient times, sometimes was only another rôle for the prophet of God.

It is possible that undue emphasis has been put upon the work of tallying the facts of history with earlier vaticinations, and that the disposition to produce tally sheets surprisingly and suspiciously exact has played fantastic and foolish tricks in the past. It is also possible that predispositions have approached the question from the other side as well.

The enthusiasm with which it has been announced that the early dates of the fulfilled predictions must, after critical study, be brought down to a time so near the tallying fact as to rob the whole matter of the extraordinary, and the partisan spirit with which men have argued that the predictions themselves are so worded as to make impossible their specific reference to any particular event, justify the suspicion that possibly the reaction from this old-time proof has gone very decidedly to the other extreme.

There should be no desire to challenge the assured results of critical study. Christianity has least need of all of that champion who would make its truth to appear by any evidence that is not itself absolutely true. Apologetics regard with solicitude the final verdicts pronounced in every court of biblical criticism. The apologist accepts those verdicts and shapes his defense accordingly. Critic meets critic, and, after their battle, the field of evidences must adjust itself to the result.

It is impossible to believe that this proof from fulfilled predictions has been nullified by the disintegrations of a negative criticism. We all know human nature well enough to know that no man can foretell what will come to pass in the distant future. No man knows what a single day will bring forth.

An impenetrable veil hides the next moment from our eyes. It is true, general predictions can be based upon generalized statements of past events. Mr. Buckle constructs an argument that does scant honor to the freedom of man, upon our ability to base, upon the statistics of the last year or the last decade, a foretelling of facts for the next year or the next decade. This is a very interesting question, upon which men of different views pronounce very different answers. But statistics are general and are based not so much upon the direct choice of the individual will as upon certain general conditions and circumstances without, in view of which men will probably choose to do as they chose to do in those same general conditions before. And this mechanical, statistical view of history has its narrow limits at best. A student of the subject may be able to say, within limits, how many murders will be committed in London during the year 1900, from a careful comparison of the number of murders in London for many years in the recent past. Experience proves that this statistical prediction often fails, and there are often seasons of epidemics in crime and spasms of virtue unforetellable, and unaccountable when past. But, granting all that is true in this, it can in no way explain the predictions of the Old Testament. The science of comparative statistics was then largely unknown. The periods stretching between the prediction and

its event were far beyond that of any one man's life. They reached into other centuries, other nations, other dynasties, other civil and social and political conditions. Much less, for the same reason, can these be accounted for by the sagacious guessings or shrewd forecastings of farsighted genius.

There is a vast deal to be done in removing what Christianity regards as unmovable before the predictive prophecies of former ages can be reduced simply to "a foresight based upon insight."

It belongs to the exegetical critic to show that the predictions themselves evidently refer to some specific event. He must inform us whether it is merely pious guessing at random, whether it refers to some fact within the eye-range of contemporaneous genius, or whether it contemplates conditions then far in the distance. Having these furnished us, it is within the power of any plain, honest student of the English Bible to note for himself whether the correspondence is real and complete and convincing; for Dean Mozley has truly said of predictive prophecy: "The essence of prophecy is the correspondence, not the futurity, of the event predicted."[1]

It is impossible, within prescribed limits, to do

[1] *Eight Lectures on Miracles*, p. 119.

more than has been done, in intimating the force and value of this evidence. If Christianity is of God, the whole revelation of God in Christ is divine. The plan unfolds, develops, expands, from the first word, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." There is the promise of a Saviour to come. Age by age, the plan unfolds, the promise is specialized. Of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David, he is to be. The Messianic psalms have an unmistakable reference to him who came. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah reads like preterit history. The mind, untrained to doubt, understands it to mean Jesus as quickly as the words of Matthew or of Mark. Compare the vivid predictions of Nineveh and Babylon with their history. Read how Jerusalem is to be plowed over as a field. Go, as the writer of these words has gone, and walk over the literally plowed furrows, scarcely a stone's throw from the minaret of the mosque of Omar, where the temple once stood, and under the shadow of the present walls of the sacred city, and you will not wait to read that Terentius Rufus once plowed over the site of the city. Study the marvelous predictions concerning the Jewish people, and then study the marvelous career they have had. Compare the predictive utterances of our Lord with the details of the facts as they are. Go to Bethsaida

and Capernaum, and behold for yourself, in unfrequented marshes and tumbledown ruins, the awe-inspiring literalness of the fulfillment. Take your Bible for your guidebook, and travel from Jaffa to the Dead Sea, and from Hebron, with its Cave of Machpelah, to Damascus in the ancient vale of the north, and see for yourself how well your guidebook serves you in detailing before the time the conditions you discover and the scenes you see. Or, if you are too busy to visit Palestine, you may this very day see in your morning paper how the most recent investigations of the archæologist in the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates are not only confirming the historical description of the Old Testament Scriptures, but are also proving anew the literal truth of their recorded predictions.

It is not now said that this is the only or the strongest proof of prophecy. It is said that it is a valuable, an unanswerable evidence that, in that great revelation of God which is Christianity, there is an element surpassing human wisdom, transcending human foresight, and attesting the guidance and the presence in it all of the supernatural and the divine.

It would, however, be a mistake amounting to injustice to suppose that all those who question the evidential value of predicted events go so far

as to deny that prophecy is any evidence of Christianity. They place great emphasis upon the proof which it is said to present. This aspect of prophecy has not always been freely recognized, but it is hardly necessary to make nothing of prediction in order to make out the moral proofs from prophecy. This we ought to have done, and not leave the other undone.

The idea now is that the prophets of God, in their "passion for righteousness," in their loyalty to sublime ideals, and in their unfaltering faith in a just and holy Governor of the world, were so conspicuously above and beyond the prevailing levels of their age as to be, in themselves, for all time, the noblest and strongest evidences of the truth of the system with which they were identified. They were inspired witness bearers of eternal realities. Their testimony was especially suited to their own surroundings, but they spoke a language that is understood always and everywhere. "We lose, doubtless, a miracle of foresight in the form of a prediction of deliverance through Cyrus, but we gain a moral miracle of faith and hope amid circumstances tempting to despair."[1] One may be pardoned for failing to perceive how the "moral miracle" gains force by the loss of the "miracle of foresight." It is not the question whether it is too crude or too easy or

[1] Bruce's *Apologetics*, p. 243.

too childish, but is it true? Criticism has not shown that it is not true, and so we need not lose the first in order to gain the second.

Still, this ethical aspect of prophecy is indeed a strong testimony to the truth of Christianity. The faith of an Abraham, the humility of a Moses, the denunciations of an Elijah, the spirit of an Isaiah, though not without their faults, stand as mighty moral teachings, in concrete form, of timeless truth and dateless righteousness. Amid sins, deep and dark, they cried out for holiness. In ages of hopeless degradation, they sounded the call of moral and spiritual purity. In idolatrous generations, they were witnesses to the forgotten true and living God. When doubt and indifference and despair and moral death sank down like an awful pall upon the nations, these martyrs for truth, these heroes of righteousness, these prophets of God, coming age after age as those sent of Heaven on Heaven's errand, stood stalwart and unmoved, like a rock in an angry sea, like an Alpine peak against the fury of the storm—preaching, remonstrating, denouncing, calling, pleading, commanding, in the name of the God who had shaken Sinai's summit while trembling Israel waited at the mountain's base. They were exotics of truth in a world of ignorance and error; they were shining lights in a world of moral night;

they were voices of God in the wildernesses of sin.

The force of all this is not diminished because by many it is viewed only as we view the convincing force of a godly life in later Christian ages. A star that is brilliant at midnight has long since faded from sight at noon. An Abraham and a David may have been less perfect saints than a Paul or a John, but the fact that they stood out as they did, from the masses of their time, with the ideals they cherished, with the truths they taught, with the failures they scored—for a failure is a witness to a height not unseen, but yet unreached—all this does constitute one of the grandest evidences of the truth of God. Nor is it lost by comparison with the saints of pagan calendars. There are spiritual diameters between a primitive Abraham, with his simple faith in God, and a Confucius who sees nothing invisible; between a Moses communing with the self-existent Jehovah of the covenant, and Zoroaster with his two contending gods; between an Isaiah grasping the thought of sin forgiven, and a Buddha seeking happiness in the very obliteration of the disposition to seek. We would not undervalue the ethical virtues or the rational utterances of alien systems; these have been vastly overstated, and men have often placed a few select and exceptional gleanings from oriental systems against the whole body of

Scripture truth; even so, the proof of "prophetism" stands unchanged and unchallenged. The prophets themselves, and their prophecies which they spoke, suited to the needs of their own age, suited to the needs of every age, sublimely uplifting, ethically pure, intrinsically true, freighted with the perfumes of heaven amid the moral miasmata of sin and vice and unbelief—these are proofs that grow in power and shine in brighter splendor as mankind are learning more and more to perceive the beautiful, to love the good, and to believe the true.

The word of God is an anvil that has worn out many a hammer.—Venerable Bede.

All our ideas of progress, with all the forward-looking spirit of modern Christendom, are due to Scripture.—Strong.

In the Bible there is more that *finds me* than I have experienced in all other books put together.—Coleridge.

The English Bible—a book which, if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.—Macaulay.

It would take a Jesus to forge a Jesus.—Theo. Parker.

CHAPTER IX

SCRIPTURE

It is entirely conceivable that the substance of Christianity is true, even though there were no such book as the Bible in existence. The great doctrines of God and holiness and right and character and destiny are not intrinsically contingent upon a little volume which a playful child may fling into the flames.

However, Christianity, as it is, is something more than an abstract of transcendental truth. It is truth made concrete. It comes down to the levels of history. Its high abstractions become living forces, its eternal principles blossom into fadeless facts. Christianity, not as it might be but as it is, stakes its claims to truth upon Sinai and Calvary, upon Egyptian oppressions and Babylonian captivities, upon Judæan scenes and apostolic missions. It is history as well as doctrine, it is fact as well as theory, it is the real as well as the ideal. The truths of Christianity have so transformed themselves into the living forces of the past, they have so inwrought themselves into the very warp

and woof of humanity, that we cease to regard them simply as a cold volume of abstractions appealing to the philosophic instinct or the rational powers only; they have become incarnate, historic, concrete, real, and we justly judge their merits by those signs and symbols with which their fate is so inseparably linked.

If God is to reveal himself to man at all, it must needs be that he do it under the conditions of space and time. That means history. Unless, as Dr. Martineau teaches, a revelation "at second hand" is impossible, it is necessary that a witnessing record of former revelations, now ceased, must be placed in the hands of men to-day. That means Scripture. If at sundry times and in divers manners in time past God by the prophets spake unto the fathers, and if in later days he spoke unto his apostles by his Son, who is the express image of his Person, then in these last days of ours, when prophets are asleep and apostles are treasured memories of history, if we are to hear his voice and catch his message, it is because the written word preserves, embalms, perpetuates, his revelations to the farthest ends of time and the remotest regions of the earth.

Thus it is that Christianity is embodied in a book.

This book is, to him who sees it for the first

time, precisely like every other book. If afterwards it seems to him unique and alone in all literature, it is because he first regarded it as he would regard any other book. He finds, to his amazement, in testing it as a book, that there is no other book like it. If the Bible cannot stand the sharpest scrutinies of the critic, so much the worse for the Bible. Let the critic only be fair, and the Christian has no cause to complain.

It is not in mind now to discuss the critical questions that are raised nowadays by the study of the Christian Scriptures. We are to take a hasty glance at Scripture and consider whether it furnishes any evidence that Christianity is supernatural. We shall not now argue that the Bible is inspired. We shall hardly take time to insist that its contents are historically true. The limits set upon our task admonish us that volumes must be pages, and that vast ranges of tempting evidence must not be even so much as mentioned.

The Bible is the battlefield of modern faith and unbelief. There is scant ground for despair when the word of God is more and more commanding and compelling the ripest intellectual energies of men. The men who call it false cannot bring themselves to dismiss it as unworthy of their further study. Strauss said that the Copernican astronomy struck the death knell of Bible Christianity; but somehow the Bible did not lose its place at the

center of civilization when the race got it fairly fixed in their minds that the earth revolves around the sun, and not the sun around the earth.

Some of the Philistines are going so far just now as to lead us to suspect that if *they* are right Scripture is wrong, and that if Scripture is wrong Christianity is a dream. Mr. Gladstone has hopefulness enough to say that "if the most greedily destructive among all the theories of the modern critics (rather seriously at variance with one another) were established as true, it would not avail to impair the great facts of the history of man . . . nor to disguise the light which those facts throw upon the pages of the sacred volume, nor to abate the commanding force with which—bathed, so to speak, in the flood of that light—the Bible invites, attracts, and commands the adhesion of mankind."[1]

Precisely this is the standpoint of our study now. Let the critics have their way; let unbelief cut and cleave to its full content; let men prove, if they can, that the dear old Bible is a tissue of falsehoods or of follies: when they have done, we shall claim the humble right to call attention to the strangest of all strange facts, that this "scroll of fancies" is the subject of more study, more investigation, more serious thought, than any other hundred books in any library of the world; that

[1] *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, p. 25.

this "bundle of superstitions" lies imbedded like a corner stone of granite beneath the grandest achievements of human civilization, and that this little manual of "exploded nonsense" somehow continues to hold its own, and, in Mr. Gladstone's words, "invites, attracts, and commands the adhesion of mankind."

The starting point of our thought is the Bible itself. Whatever else it is or is not, the Bible is itself a fact. It is about the most pervasive, the most ubiquitous fact, in book form, with which we are acquainted. In civilized lands, at least, it is hard to get very far away from a Bible. You find it in railway cars and in steamboat drawing-rooms. It greets you in hotel chambers in almost every city of Europe or America. If a man give his testimony in a law controversy between his neighbors, he places his hand upon the Bible and solemnly promises to speak the truth. The president of the greatest republic of history, in the presence of his admiring fellow-citizens, reverently places his lips to that little book before those lips presume to speak the solemn words with which he enters upon his vast responsibilities. You visit your friend in his home, and Bibles great and small you see scattered about the apartments of his house. You will not be surprised if, morning and evening, he hand you one of these and ask

you to join his family as they sit, each with a Bible in hand, and read in turn a passage from its pages—all reverently concluded with a prayer in worship of Almighty God. Visit many of our colleges, and you will find the Bible studied as no other book is studied. Go into the public schools of civilized countries, and, for the most part, you will find it reverently read as the sacred book among all the books that are the object of their study. Betake yourself to the sanctum of the editor; you will find his Bible and his dictionary at his elbow. Come into the office of an attorney, and you will justly conclude that he is unworthy of a single client if you do not find the code of Moses on his shelves along with the Commentaries of Blackstone. Visit the literary man, the poet, the orator, the statesman, the scientist, the philosopher, and you will find among their books of reference somewhere near at hand this same little Bible.

Besides all this, remember the millions of children, old and young, that assemble one day in the week, especially for the systematic study of this book. Think of the thousands and thousands of great buildings, and not so great, in the city and in the country everywhere, in which from time to time, very frequently, millions of enlightened, cultivated, refined people, many of them, assemble to hear this book explained and preached from. Think

of the vast Bible societies printing this book in three hundred and fifty different languages, and sending it far and wide, for pay—or, if need be, for nothing—into every land on earth. Think of the tremendous volume of literature, from the stately scholastic tome to the merest penny lesson leaf, that is being constantly thrown off the printer's desk, to defend, to explain, and to enforce, this same little Bible.

Certainly, not much is risked in starting with the Bible as a *fact* to-day.

But this fact is not of yesterday's sudden appearing. We know that our Bible was also the Bible of our fathers. The career of this little book in the past is one of the marvels of history. Too many hostile eyes have been upon it in every age, to allow of its putting forth claims it could not make good in fact. It has had to carve its course down the lines of history. No sensible man questions its antiquity. Exactly how or when it originated is a subject upon which competent minds, though having sharp disagreements in detail, are in many ways agreed. There is no doubt that the Old Testament which we have to-day is identical with the sacred Scriptures which the Jews held in reverence at the beginning of our era. Damaging assaults upon the authenticity and the authority of the several books of our New Tes-

tament have again and again been made, but the results only stand more fully assured. The three Synoptic Gospels have stood the tests and are accepted to-day. The Fourth Gospel, confessedly of later date, is certainly traced back to conditions that would have effectively contradicted its claims if they had been false. No reasonable school of skeptical criticism denies that Paul is the author of some of the books in our New Testament that bear his name. Men have proved that George Washington never lived and that the battle of Waterloo is a myth, and so we are not surprised that there are those who deny that Paul wrote the first four Pauline Epistles; but we are to remember that their very "hardihood" is sufficient to bar them out from the lists of reasonable skeptics.[1] Let the doubtful portions go, our enemies being judges; but what shall we say of what is left? Here it is—how did it become what it is? How did it acquire such a dominating influence? What is the secret of its power? Is it a kind of magic which, without this book, the world had never seen or known? Is this magnificent fact which our eyes behold to-day, shaping civilizations, molding nationalities, transforming empires, turning the tides of history, gradually ingratiating itself into the innermost life of mankind, and slowly imparting a new spirit into the heart of humanity—is this

[1] Bruce's *St. Paul's Conception of Christianity*, p. 2.

wholly to be accounted for on the basis of the natural? Is the Bible but a product of genius, only a *grand hit* in literature, a riper fruit of the human mind?

If the Bible be true, Christianity is true; and if Christianity is true, Christianity is supernatural. If the Bible be false, Christianity is false also; but we have the mightiest miracle of history, a "book of lies," rising by its own inherent springing force to the topmost place in the world's highest thought and life and character and hope, commending itself as true to the keenest intellects, as good to the purest souls, as divine to the saintliest among the human. It is easier to believe the Bible true, judging only from its career, than to believe it false. If it is true, its power is the supernatural power of Almighty God; if it is false, its undisputed supremacy in the world to-day can be scarcely less than a miracle of the father of lies.

But the wonderful influence of this book is not without an explanation. It is a wonder in itself. It was not written by one man. It is rather a library than a single volume. It is sixty-six different books, bound as one. Instead of a single author, it is the work of nearly fifty. Instead of being the output of a single lifetime, it was fifteen hundred years in the making. There was the greatest variety imaginable among the authors of

these books: wise men, kings, priests, reformers, fishermen, physicians, tax collectors; men of high intellectual refinement, and men who never saw a college; men of most aristocratic social antecedents and surroundings, and men whose instincts and ideas were in keeping with the lowly social station which they occupied; men who lived amid the regal splendors of a theocratic monarchy, and men who were citizens of an humble province lorded over by a haughty Cæsar at Rome. And yet, with all this wide range of mental caliber and moral fiber, there is a harmony, a unity, running throughout the whole, that is obvious to every student of the Word. As Augustine said: "The New Testament lies *latent* in the Old, and the Old Testament lies *patent* in the New." The Bible, as a book, is an organism. There is a growth in its thought. There is a development in its revelation; but it is one throughout, as the acorn and the tree are one, as the blade and the ear and the full corn in the ear are one.

This is a striking fact in connection with the Scriptures. If we try to duplicate it elsewhere, we may see its significance. Try to find fifty philosophers or five philosophers covering fifteen hundred years or fifteen years, who will discuss the themes of their philosophy without contradictions and disagreements that would destroy the unity of the whole. Let a dozen statesmen discourse upon the

things of statesmanship, and you will soon find that there will be as many differing policies. Visit any symposium of science; summon the scientific leaders of our own time; listen to the words of those who believe alike, in evolution, for example, and you will find that a Darwin and Wallace and Huxley and Spencer each has his own peculiar view, that is not only different from, but inconsistent with, those of the others.

But is it objected that these are the subjects upon which men may be expected to disagree? And yet we are told that science has to do with unchanging facts, uniform laws, and mathematical demonstrations. Is there any realm of thought in which men are more apt to disagree than in that of religious truth? With the varying contents of mental, material, ethical principle, moral force, and transcendental religious speculation incident to human nature, it may well be that, with all their underlying principles in common, men who are religious teachers, and who draw only upon their own resources for what they teach, differ more sharply and disagree more incompatibly than those who deal with any other kind of practical or speculative truth.

But this fact only serves as the better foil for the marvelous unity of the Christian Scriptures. Moses testifies of Christ, and Christ came to fulfill the law of Moses. The fall by sin, as told in

Genesis, has its place in redemption as unfolded to the Romans. "The testimony of Christ is the spirit of prophecy."

While the individualities of the fifty writers are by no means suppressed, it so falls out that their ignorance and prejudice do not come in to mar the essential harmony of the whole. This unparalleled feature of Scripture is an unsolved enigma, if Christianity be natural and only natural; it falls as a corollary from the truth, if it be supernatural.

The naturalist is hardly done with miracles when he dismisses Christianity as natural. We would not be guilty of arguing success as an evidence of the divine, but we may argue that human knowledge is a chimera, and the *desire* to know is a constitutional deception, if it can be that the sanest and soberest and most aspiring portion of mankind, applying honest tests and seeking simple truth, have been hoodwinked into believing a budget of falsehoods to be a revelation from God. Is it too much to say that the portion of our race which has been identified with what the historian calls the Christian civilization has, in part at least, contained sanest, soberest, and saintliest spirits, and is it too much to say that such have profoundly believed that Christianity is of God?

Here is a miracle of psychology. Here is the

most puzzling fact of history. No wonder, we sometimes think, that a man who does not believe Christianity true, and who looks about him and sees that so many apparently sound-minded, true-hearted men and women *do* believe it to be true—no wonder that such a man throws up his hands in dismay and cries out with Pilate, "What is truth?" or, with David Hume and Herbert Spencer, "How can truth be known?"

That Bible is weapon enough against the assaults of boldest unbelief. If its lids were never opened, skepticism cannot account for the career that book has had. The single portraiture of Jesus, as we see him in the gospels, is little less than a miracle, on the theory that the Bible is a product of nature. There are four writers, and yet there is entire consistency. It takes genius to conceive and carry out a character which is the creature of our own imagination. The best fiction writers say that they make their characters to live before them, and then they note the deeds that they would do. But such a character is a child of its creator's brain; the creator must be greater than its creature.

Who is then to conceive and paint the character of Jesus, to speak his words, to preach his sermon on the mount, to coin his parables, to manufacture the stories of his miracles, to portray his lifelike spirit of tenderness, wisdom, love? Well may Dr. Bushnell say: "Nothing is

so difficult, all literature testifies, as to draw a character and keep it in its living proportions. How much more to draw a perfect character and not discolor it fatally by marks from the imperfection of the biographer."[1]

The man who had the literary genius to make a Bible out of nothing confounds the conclusions of the world's wisdom and is himself the substitute for that in which the faith of men is confident. Rousseau's remark is fully justified, that "the inventor of such a being as Jesus would be a more astonishing character than the hero."

If Hamlet is great, the brain of a Shakespeare is greater. If Jesus is good, the thought of the man who could conjure a Jesus from the shades of his own fancy is better. If the Bible, with its great truths, its accredited facts, and its inspiring promises, is wonderful, the inventor of such a book is more wonderful. If Christianity, with its Eternal God, its Incarnate Christ, and its redeemed humanity, is a fiction, then the fabricator of that fiction is as supernatural as the Christianity in which the Christian believes.

[1] *Nature and the Supernatural*, p. 357.

The evolution which is slowly proceeding in human society is not primarily intellectual, but religious, in character. —KIDD.

We are but of yesterday, and yet we have filled all your places, your cities, your islands, your castles, your towns, your council houses, even your camps, your tribes, your senate, your forum. We have left you nothing but your temples.—TERTULLIAN.

For I say, this is death and the sole death,
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
And lack of love from love made manifest.

—BROWNING.

Henceforth my heart shall sigh no more
For olden time and holier shore;
God's love and blessing, then and there,
Are now and here and everywhere.

—WHITTIER.

CHAPTER X

HISTORY

CHRISTIANITY is now old enough to have shown what it is. If eighteen centuries are too short a time for a fair experiment, then it must be admitted that its sluggishness is virtually equal to failure. Neither can it claim that the conditions have been such as to make a fair test impossible; it is part of its work to prepare the conditions. It is because the world was all wrong, that Christianity undertook to make it right. That would be a strange kind of physician, who would excuse himself from failure on the ground that his patient was sick when he was called. It is because men get sick that physicians are needed at all. It is because mankind are helpless and hopeless that redemption had any occasion whatever to be. And unless it has in itself a power to quicken and renovate and restore these dead relics of the race, then failure is the verdict.

By its fruits let it be judged. Dropping dialectical tactics, let history pass its plain judgment upon the merits of Christianity. Steering clear

of the two-edged argument that because it began so small, and from its small beginnings has grown so great, *therefore* Christianity is divine, let us consider for a little the nature and drift of the moral influence which this growing religion has exerted upon the world. It is not possible to itemize the evidence which history affords.[1] We can only glance at the *trend* of that evidence.

It is perfectly plain that the principles of Christianity tend to broaden the sympathies of those who accept them. It is a persistent arraignment of the crime of selfishness. Men who decline to grant the claims of the Preacher on the mount go into ecstasies of admiration over the sermon on the mount. Jesus Christ was the first teacher of universal ethnography. "The field is the world," he said. The Samaritan brought relief to the suffering Jew by the wayside, and, though he belonged to a race that for ages had been at the outs with the Jews, yet he, and not the fellow-Hebrew, either priest or Levite, who passed by on the other side, was indeed *neighbor* to the wounded man. Neighborship, then, is a thing of spirit and not of geography or of kin. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,

[1] The reader can consult such books as Dr. Dorchester's *Problem of Religious Progress*, Brace's *Gesta Christi*, and Dr. R. S. Storrs' *The Divine Origin of Christianity indicated by its Historical Effects.*

and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and *thy neighbor as thyself*." "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Do men talk learnedly of *altruism* nowadays? What is all this but altruism? Prof. Huxley found no signs of it in the "cosmic process." Prof. Drummond thinks he does find them there, and even enthusiastically says: "The vicarious principle is shot through and through the whole vast web of nature." [1] If we sometimes must confess that in this we have no better eyes than Prof. Huxley had, still we can agree with Prof. Drummond when he says: "From selfism to otherism is the supreme transition of history." [2] Only, we locate that supreme transition definitely in the teachings, the life, the character—and, most of all, in the death—of Him who gave not only his name, but also his Spirit, to Christianity.

It is easy to make the mistake of identifying too closely civilization and Christianity. As Guizot has pointed out, the former is a term of very elastic meaning. There was a Grecian civilization, and a Roman civilization; there is a Chinese civilization and a European civilization. But in the lexicons of common speech it must be said that, in modern

[1] *The Ascent of Man*, p. 18.
[2] Ibid., p. 220.

history, civilization par excellence is the Christian civilization. It is the whole complex life of an age whose ideas and motives and laws and customs and institutions are "shot through and through" with the indirect influences of Christianity. The ethics of Christian civilization are founded upon Christianity. The ideas of civil government contemplate it. The relations between ruler and ruled, between employer and employed, between buyer and seller, between teacher and learner, are tempered by the softened atmosphere of Christianity. The home at its best is the gift of Christianity. The marriage relation is sealed and sanctified by its benedictions. Society is transformed from Huxley's "wilderness of apes" into a sweet and cheerful altruistic colony of men and women. Is it said that this is ideal? Let it be so. To the honor of Christianity be it remembered that its aims are never realized this side of absolute perfection. If the ideal is not realized, the fault is not with the ideal. Rousseau actually says: "The shortcomings of Christians do not prove that religion is superfluous, but that few persons are religious." If hypocrites are many, it only proves that the value of the genuine coin is the more highly appreciated. Men do not counterfeit pennies, but sovereigns; not dimes, but dollars.

The salutary influences of Christianity are so pervasive that no member of society can escape

them if he would. How ludicrous for the son of a Christian home, the alumnus of a Christian college, to turn his fire upon the very Christianity that gave him both his guns and his ammunition! Men would fain divorce morality from religion; but, if that divorce had been proclaimed before they themselves had inherited the blessings of the union, their own poor, miserable, mean selves would then have been the most eloquent argument for the other side of the question. "The radical implication of morality in the religious view of the world and history may indeed pass from the consciousness of particular individuals who have been educated by the Christian community, but it continues to exist in the common spirit of the whole community, by which the individual moral spirit is maintained and reared."[1]

Frances Power Cobbe says: "It would take several thousand years to make a full-blooded atheist out of the scion of forty generations of Christianity." A man who learns to speak well turns his eloquence into ungrateful denunciations of his teacher; a man who inherits a fortune from another uses his wealth to blacken the memory of his benefactor; the brilliant son of a Christian minister, taught to think and trained in moral virtue by his pious father, goes forth from his

[1] Pfleiderer's *Philosophy and Development of Religion*, i., p. 58.

consecrated home to hurl his barbed shafts at Christian teaching, and to throw the vitriol of his sarcasm into the fair face of godly reverence. This is the *cut* flower of Christian morality; this is the *soured* fruit of Christian civilization. Truly the corruption of the best things is the worst.

Christianity is vividly conscious that its ideals are yet far in the distance. If that consciousness were dead, then Christianity were extinct.

Let it not be forgotten that, with all the shortcomings of its devotees, the spirit of modern Christianity, fully aware of the fields yet to be occupied and the foes yet to be overcome, calls out with never-ceasing pathos and power, to all who love God and fellow-man, to bend every energy to the speedy accomplishment of its work and to the final redemption of the world. Christianity is not known to-day more by what it has done than by what, in the name of God, it is aiming to do. It beholds with pain and blush the abuses, the oppressions, the cruelties, the hatreds, the sins, that curse the habitations of mankind. Every evil it sees is a burning call of need. Its voice is raised against every form of unrighteousness. Temperance is its child; fraternity is its spirit; mutual burden-bearing is its injunction; the consolations of a deep and tender sympathy are its benison. It fans the brow of suffering; it soothes the nerves

of grief; it comforts the heart of sorrow; it echoes, in the ears of dying ones, "The Lord is my shepherd," "Let not your heart be troubled," "In my Father's house are many mansions." After that echo dies away, it turns to the bereaved ones and cheers their sorrow with a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

It looks out upon the fields of trade and business and commerce, and bids the busy seekers after wealth remember that they are not beasts, but men. It offers the only cure for a diseased political economy. In sociology, as it ought to be, Christ's law is supreme. In international quarrels, it represses the hand of violence and speaks the soft answer that turns away wrath. It is the sworn enemy of superstition, and scorns the devotion which is but the child of ignorance. It sends its missionaries into lands that lie in moral darkness and in spiritual death. The last hundred years, with their mighty impulse of Christian foreign missions, are rich in unanswerable evidences of the saving power of the gospel of Christ. The proof is alike convincing, whether we look at those who bore the message or at those who have received it.

David Livingstone, dying on his knees on the quiet banks of the inland lake, praying for the salvation of Africa, is an argument for Christianity matched only by the loving and loyal lives

of those who, by his work, were changed from cruel cannibals to consecrated Christians. Read the lives of modern missionaries, study the records of modern missions, and see what Christianity can do for character, for life, for civilization, and for humanity.

If such words as these be credited by skepticism to a dogmatic spirit that takes everything for granted, then we have space to say only that many others, who were not in position to be regarded as "counsel for the defense," have been guilty of the same. Coleridge said, "The Church is the shrine of morality," and the judgment of men is becoming clearer and stronger that morality, minus Christ, is unworthy of the name. Mr. Froude, in his essay on "Calvinism," says: "Christianity became the vitalizing spirit of a new organization of society. All that we call modern civilization, in a sense which deserves the name, is the visible expression of the transforming power of the gospel."[1]

The eloquent testimony of James Russell Lowell is too good to omit: "When the microscopic search of skepticism which has hunted the heavens and sounded the seas to disprove the existence of a Creator has turned its attention to human society,

[1] *Short Studies of Great Subjects*, vol. ii., p. 45. Scribners' ed.

and has found a place on this planet, ten miles square, where a decent man can live in decency, comfort, and security, supporting and educating his children, unspoiled and unpolluted; a place where age is reverenced, infancy protected, manhood respected, womanhood honored, and human life held in due regard—when skeptics can find such a place, ten miles square, on this globe, where the gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way, and laid the foundations, and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for the skeptical literati to move thither and ventilate their views. But so long as these very men are dependent upon the very religion which they discard for every privilege they enjoy, they may well hesitate a little before they seek to rob the Christian of his hope, and humanity of its faith in that Saviour who alone has given to man that hope of life eternal which makes life tolerable and society possible, and robs death of its terrors and the grave of its gloom."

But someone will be quick to exclaim that, if civilization is Christianity, then we abandon the very position for which we are arguing. But civilization is *not* Christianity. It is the effect, the product, the periphery, the hem of the garment, of it. Not every civilized man is a Christian, but *ipso facto* he is the subject of social and

moral and religious forces that are the product of Christianity and that have made him what he is. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom. Christianity primarily is a thing of spirit, then of life; of heart, then of society. The core of the argument which we are now urging is in the inmost heart of devout, godly, Christian men and women in the world. One John B. Gough, lifted from the gutter to Christian manhood, is an argument for Christianity that all the magazines of unbelief cannot overcome. A Jerry McAuley, a queen of Madagascar, a Narayin Sheshadri, these are the evidences breathing, testifying, living, working, speaking, dying, for Christ, which an astonished world cannot gainsay or dispute. Plato said that ignorance is the curse of man, and that for him to know the right was to do it. The ages are against the opinion of Plato. The seventh chapter of Romans photographs the conflict in outline, not only in the believer's heart, but also in every man's who can ever say that, what he would, he does not, but what he hates, that he does.

It is the distinguishing glory of Christianity that it furnishes such a man with the *motive power* to realize, in some measure at least, his noble aspirations. The divine dynamic which it furnishes is the guarantee of the final victory. It is nowhere else to be found; it is the deathless life of God;

it is the new birth in the soul. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

The only complete apologist is he who has this evidence within him. One man's new heart is evidence "at second hand" to his neighbor. The proofs of individual experience are good for their face value only to him who has possessed them. This is why the perfervid "testimonies" that drown out the better devotional spirit of a certain type of present-day prayer meetings are subject to a liberal discount. Our neighbor's life may have apologetic value, but his heart is hidden from our eyes. We judge that heart, if it is ours to judge at all, only by the life.

The best evidence of the truth of Christianity is personal. Lazarus never doubted Christ's power to raise the dead after he himself had been raised at Bethany. The blind man declined to be drawn into the cavils and quibbles of the scribes and Pharisees, but only this he said, and he said it because he knew it absolutely well: "Whereas I was blind, now I see." It is said of John Newton that he was once asked whether or not he believed that the grace of God could convert the heathen to the Christian faith; and his reply was this: "Since the grace of God has saved John Newton, I have never for a moment doubted its power to save any other living man."

The heart of man is the arena in which the signal triumphs of Christianity must ever be scored. The microcosm shall lead the macrocosm, and a society, a nation, a race, of newborn individual men and women, is the kingdom of heaven already come.

Celsus was wont to mock the early Christians with the taunt, "Only sinners become Christians," and the reply was convincing and complete: "Yes; because only Christ can turn sinners into saints." One Christian man proves Christianity true. The evidence from non-Christians is no evidence at all. Only the pure in heart shall see God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Intellectual judgment upon the evidences of Christianity is blindness passing upon the beauties of a flower garden, it is a deaf ear pronouncing upon the sweet melodies of music. The brilliant satirist gave Christianity a hundred years to die; but the room in which he wrote its obituary became a Bible depot not long after he himself had died with a miserable groan on his lips. When Christianity dies, the despair of death will fasten its horrors upon humanity's heart; but because it lives and will live and gives life to all who will receive it, the inheritance of the race is holiness and hope and heaven.

Soul is kindled by soul. To teach religion, the first thing needful, and also the last and the only thing, is the finding of a man who *has* religion.—CARLYLE.

There are only two sorts of men: the one, just, who believe themselves sinners; the other, sinners, who believe themselves just.—PASCAL.

Jesus is the highest of the pillars that show to man whence he comes and whither he ought to tend. In him is condensed all that is good and exalted in our nature.—RENAN.

The Christ of the gospels is shown to be the center and strength of every argument for the truth of Christianity. The miracles of the Old Testament all lead up to him. The success of Christianity is due to him. Prophecy derives all its coherence and significance from him. The adaptation of Christianity is due to him.—CAIRNS.

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST THE SUPREME EVIDENCE

It is not necessary to produce evidence that there once lived in Syria a man whose name was Jesus. No one seriously doubts that. His earthly career is a *fact*. But talk as we may of "naked facts," no fact is naked. It is related to other facts. It has its *locus* in the past. It is first an effect, and then a cause, of other facts in the chain which the historian makes it his task to trace. An isolated, solitary, disconnected fact would be utterly unintelligible. Hence it is that just so sure as the mind thinks, it endeavors, by dint of its very nature, to find an interpretation of every historical fact that it discovers. Facts are significant not in themselves, but because they are rich in results, because they are meaningful factors in the field of history.

Preëminently is this true of Christianity. As Dr. Warfield, of Princeton, says: "All its facts are doctrines, and all its doctrines are facts."[1] There are many who dissent from this. They tell

[1] *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, July, 1896, p. 424.

us that the idea is everything, the fact nothing. It is not *the* truth, but truth, we should desire. Indeed, for truth to become fact in history would be to tarnish it and rob it of its lofty essence.

> "What never and nowhere as fact did hold
> Is that alone which never can grow old."

This Hegelian view of things takes slow hold upon the practical, matter-of-fact Saxon mind, and yet just now there is a sort of neo-Hegelian revival among thinkers who speak the English language.

The true position is this, namely: that, with its pure ideals, Christianity presents facts in its history which prove those ideals both practicable and attainable; and accordingly those facts are tortured and suppressed by any attempt to strip them of their appropriate rational and ethical significance.

Given the fact of Jesus' life, to what rationale does that fact lead the inquiring mind? What are the elements of that fact? Was he like other men? No two men are precisely alike. Was his difference one of degree, or was it one of kind? Dr. Bushnell's celebrated chapter in his *Nature and the Supernatural* supports this thesis: "The character of Jesus forbids his possible classification with men." If that be true, whatever forbids such classification is an implied element in

the fact of Jesus' life. That fact includes his words, his deeds, his Spirit, his birth, his death, his teachings concerning himself, his explanations of any unusual power he possessed. The historical life of Jesus of Nazareth is a marvelously complex and composite fact, and to anyone who sincerely examines, analyzes, and explains, that fact, it will become apparent that there were involved therein certain forces and certain far-reaching truths that differentiate it from every other in all the tract of historic study.

It is going too far to say that, as Louis remarked, "L'état c'est moi"—"I am the State"—so Jesus may say: "I am Christianity."[1] But it is not going too far to say that the concrete fact of Jesus' life on the page of the history of mankind is the crowning evidence that Christianity is true. Starting with that conceded fact, it is utterly impossible to propose any credible explanation of it other than Christianity furnishes. As a matter of history, no other explanation has ever been suggested which does not omit or obscure some of the elements involved in the fact. We are not now arguing the historical trustworthiness of the gospel records; we are taking that for granted, though by no means without ample warrant, and what we say is, that, with the plain, sober, *prima facie*, believ-

[1] See Watson's *Mind of the Master*, p. 188; also, Van Dyke's *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, p. viii.

able narratives of the evangelists in our hands, the world has never yet succeeded in bringing forth any rational explanation of the facts there recorded which has at the same time kept those facts in mind and commanded the assent of skeptical spirits. The life of Jesus stands on the page of the past to confound utterly every doctrine that disowns him, every doubt that refuses to accept him. "What shall we do with this man which is called Jesus?" "What think ye of Christ?" These are questions which are still waiting for a clear and positive answer other than that he is indeed the Son of God. The Church may be invaded by weakness and unseemly strifes, but Christ is the evidence we are now presenting. The dialectical arguments of the schools may vanquish us by their bold brilliancy, and yet leave the heart loyal, after all; but it is the living, breathing, loving Christ whose convincing evidence approaches the intellect through the warm and tender affections of the heart, of whom we now speak.

The honest inquirer will never stop this side of some kind of explanation of that unique moral phenomenon, the life of Jesus. There is a kind of superficial reverence that would fain cover the Christ of the gospels with wreaths of compliment while refusing to look beneath the surface at the meaning of it all. Compare this Jesus with other

men. You find at once that your comparison is a contrast. Look only at his spirit: simplicity, humility, gentleness, dignity, calmness, patience. His intellectual supremacy gives no hint of academical pedantry or of studied precision. The simplest scenes of nature were the instruments in his hands of teaching sublimest moral truths. There is a sort of shock that evidences a subtle incongruity in the thought when men speak of the incomparable parables, the peerless moral maxims, and the lofty ideals and incentives, which fell without effort from his lips, in the same way in which they speak of the philosophical treatises of a Plato, of the tragedies of a Shakespeare, or the poems of a Tennyson. The wonderful naturalness of it all shows that the mind has already placed the secret farther back—in himself. He was a great Teacher of moral truth, but the great Teacher makes himself the unconscious illustration of his lesson. He was the divine Preacher of the truth, but the supreme excellence of the Preacher is in the fact that his message and its Messenger are one. He was a man different from all others in this, that, while few have presumed to point to any blemish in his life, he quietly but absolutely refused to admit a single blemish there. The better human saints are, the more sensible are they of the few things in which they come short. This is the inexplicable fact concerning Jesus, that, if he was not sin-

less, he should have failed to confess his sins. More: this is the most inexplicable point of all, that, if he was not divine, he should allow the impression to go out that he was divine. When his followers so impressed the people that they fell down to do them homage, they exclaimed: "We also are men of like passions with you," "Stand up; I myself also am a man." How different the manner of Jesus challenging his critics: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" calling to the multitude to come unto him and he will give them rest, and telling his disciples that he and the Father are one, for he was before Abraham was!

The puzzling question for doubt to answer arises in these words of Jesus concerning himself. If he was the best man that ever lived, and yet falsely said of himself that he was *more than man*, what shall we say? Had he all the virtues of perfection except that of modest truthfulness in speaking of himself? Can it be that he, who taught that repentance is the first step which all men must take if they would enter into the kingdom of God, never repented of a single sin and studiously refrained from giving to the world any sign that he ever did repent? He taught that all men should confess their sins and be forgiven, but he also taught that he had no sins of his own to confess or to be forgiven. This is the contradiction of contradictions,

for which there is no possible solution except in the fact that Jesus was precisely what he gave out that he was, and precisely what his followers have ever since believed, and to-day profoundly and reverently believe, that he was. The Latin proverb is not too strong, "*Aut Christus Deus aut homo non bonus est.*" [1]

Someone has said that the historic life of Jesus answers exactly to Plato's picture of the perfect man, suffering for the sins of others, but having no sins of his own to suffer for. That life nineteen hundred years ago is the fulfillment of the prophecy which is uttered in every human heart. It is the real, answering to the soul's ideal. To have a soul is to be a prophet, for in every living soul with conscience and guilt and ideals and aspirations, however feeble, there is a picture of a character that is stainless, of a life that is pure.

If Christ had never lived, the inborn expectations of humanity would have been forever disappointed. He is the cosmopolitan of the ages. He lived in Judæa and Galilee, and his life took on the coloring and complexion of its surroundings. But he is at home in every age, he is a citizen of every country. Born on Asiatic soil, he is the founder and inspiration of a civilization that has scored its greatest achievements west of

[1] "Either Christ was God, or he was not a good man."

Asia Minor, and seems destined to go on until all the continents acknowledge its benignant sway. No man but sees in him his brother. His was the authority of the lawgiver coupled with the humility of him who keeps that law. He requires nothing which he is not willing himself to yield.

> "The Christ himself had been no lawgiver
> Unless he had given the life too with the law."

His teachings need no revision to suit changes in social life or civil history. It would grate upon our ears to hear him called philosopher or scientist, and yet there is a sublime philosophy in his teachings which is all the more impressive because it is hidden; there is a science in his teachings which astonishes the proud achievements of modern psychology, and which needs no modification to suit the discoveries of modern research. Mr. Romanes points out what he regards as "one of the strongest pieces of objective evidence in favor of Christianity which is not sufficiently enforced by apologists." "It is the absence, from the biography of Christ, of any doctrines which the subsequent growth of human knowledge—whether in natural science, ethics, political economy, or elsewhere—has had to discount."[1] He then proceeds to quote these words from Mr. J. S. Mill: "Not even now could it be easy, even for an unbeliever,

[1] *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 167.

to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life."[1]

This is significant testimony from witnesses none too willing. Let some man put forth a revised edition of the sermon on the mount, or of the thirteenth chapter of St. Matthew, or of the fourteenth chapter of St. John, and the amused contempt of mankind would quickly show how infinitely beyond the ordinary utterances of ethical wisdom are the sublime deliverances of "Him who spake as never man spake."

It is said that, one day, as Lord Tennyson and a friend were sauntering along the Strand, in London, they stopped to look at some pictures in a window. His friend knew the poet's partiality for Dante, and so he asked him what there was in Dante's face which was lacking in Goethe's. In a flash came the reply: "The divine." The heart of man in every age no sooner beholds the face of Jesus than it discerns that which distinguishes it from every other, and, as it gazes into the depths of that soul-lit countenance, it comes like an instinct to the beholder that what he sees is the face of the divine. The character of Jesus needs no argument or apology. It is its own evidence; it is self-evidencing.

That is a beautiful story which is told of Charles

[1] *Three Essays on Theism*, p. 255.

Lamb, who was once asked what he would do if some of the world's greatest men should suddenly enter his room. Shakespeare being named, he said: "Ah, we should all rise and uncover." "And Christ?" With lowered tone, he reverently answered: "You see, we should all kneel."

It is impossible to set forth the myriad-sided character of Jesus. In that marvelous piece of art, the Apollo Belvedere, its perfection consists not in its reproduction of any existing human figure; it is rather an unrealized combination of the physical perfections of the "human form divine." It is, in so far, ideal. It is an eclectic from a race of imperfections, in which the imperfect parts are eliminated and the perfections combined into this classical triumph of the sculptor's art.

Jesus Christ is more than the moral Apollo Belvedere of humanity. His character is not a mosaic of single human virtues. It is not a mechanism, but an organism. In him the ideal is realized without being in the least degree degraded by its medium or by its surroundings. In him the human is honored by its contact with the divine, while the divine is not dishonored by its contact with the human. The mind can create and cherish no loftier ideal of character, of life, of spirit, of service, of dignity, or of moral splendor, than that which was realized in him over eighteen hundred

years ago. The cross on which he was crucified has been raised by that one death into the symbol of all that is most hallowed to the human heart and most precious in the future of the race. His life was perfect, crowned by the glory of an unselfish Saviour's death.

> "Through all the depths of sin and loss,
> Drops the plummet of the cross;
> Never yet abyss was found
> Deeper than the cross could sound."

The argument, in imperfect form and inadequate outline, is now presented. The limits set have already been overpassed. The merit of the evidence presented will be variously judged by various judges. After all, speculative doubt is rather the symptom than the cause of disturbances of men's faith. There are certain antecedent moral conditions that are indispensable if we would believe. It is unfair and unjust to question the sincerity of all doubt, but, the doubter being witness, skepticism is certainly not always deep or thoughtful or very sincere. Marie Corelli tells us that she once asked an ardent Buddhist the reason why he preferred Buddhism to Christianity, and, after a little hesitation, the ardent Buddhist answered: "Oh, I don't know. Anything for a change!"[1] Such a flippant doubt could not be ascribed to David

[1] *Romance of Two Worlds*, p. 15.

Hume, one of the greatest of Scotch philosophers, and yet it is said of David Hume that, not long after the death of his mother, he spoke these words to his friend Boyle: "Ah, my friend, I throw out my speculations to entertain the learned and metaphysical world; yet, in other things, I do not think so differently from the rest of the world as you imagine."[1] More profoundly earnest still was the spirit of that brilliant scientist of modern England, whose untimely death the whole scholarly world was called upon to mourn, and who had made his way first to a state of reasoned skepticism, and then out of darkness into a new state of cautious but joyous trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He says: "In those days, I took it for granted that Christianity was played out!"[2] How many there are who take it for granted that Christianity is "played out"! If only they had George John Romanes' diligent spirit, his scientific thirst for truth, his open-minded attitude toward all the evidence!

The truth of God is suited to the mind of man. Tertullian says that man is naturally Christian. If the doctrines of Christianity are untrue, the sanest moments of the soul are darkened with shadows and morbid fancies of its own creation. If historic Christianity is a falsehood, the forces of history have been in league with a lie. If Jesus

[1] See Harris's *Self-Revelation of God*, p. 349.

[2] *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 164.

was either a deceived man or a deceiver, then the canons of character are utterly destroyed: in the former case, because the clearest intellect is lost in its own misty mazes; in the latter, because the purest soul is hypocritically busied in painting black falsehood in the whiteness of the truth.

The great Selden called transubstantiation rhetoric turned into logic. Let us say that Christianity as a totality of which Christ is the foundation stone and topmost pinnacle, the origin and the ending, the Alpha and the Omega, with its divine forces, its divine works, its divine teachings, its divine calls, its divine promises, and its divine ideals, is nothing else than the supernatural, by divine grace, become Living Truth.

THE END.

Date Due

Library Bureau Cat. no. 1137

21787

BT
1101
M 667

AUTHOR
Minton, H.

TITLE
Christianity Supernatural

DATE LOANED	BORROWER'S NAME	DATE RETURNED
DEC 10 '90	ATLA	

CO-CCA-787